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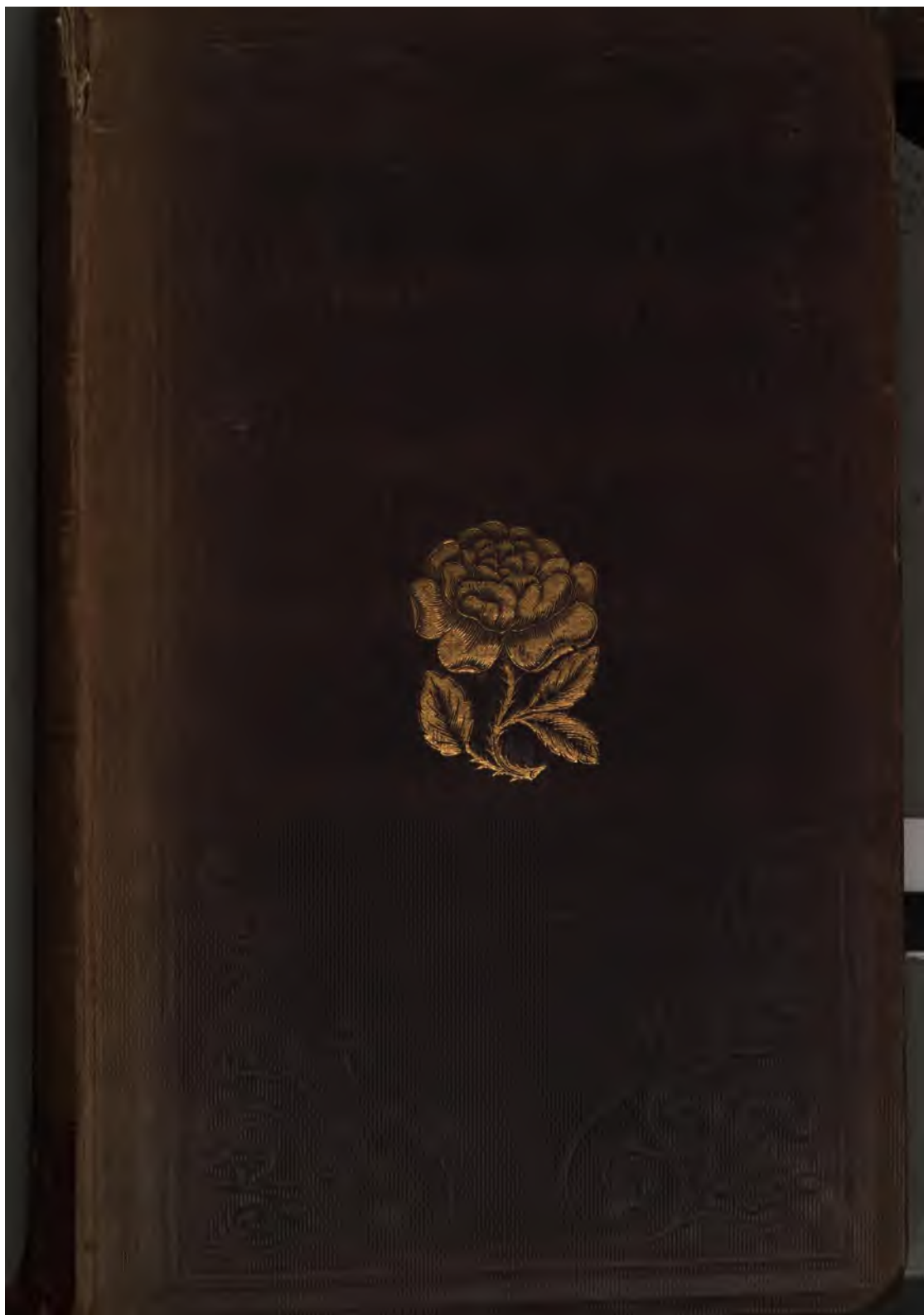
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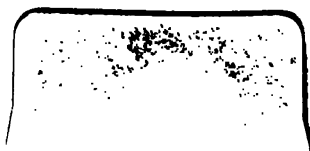
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Queen Editha.

London: Henry Colburn, Great North Street, 1843

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THE
HISTORY OF WOMAN
IN
ENGLAND,

BY
JOSEPHINE LAWSON, ESQ.

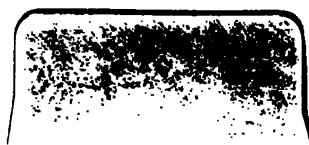


VOL. I.

LONDON,
HENRY COLBURN, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET,
1843.



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Queen Editha.

London: Henry Colburn, Great Marlborough Street, 1845



THE
HISTORY OF WOMAN
IN
ENGLAND,
BY
MANNAL LAWRENCE.



VOL. I.

LONDON.
HENRY GOLDSN, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET,
1843.

THE
HISTORY OF WOMAN
IN
ENGLAND,
AND
HER INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY AND LITERATURE,
FROM THE EARLIEST PERIOD.

BY
HANNAH LAWRENCE,
AUTHOR OF "HISTORICAL MEMOIRS OF THE QUEENS OF ENGLAND,
FROM THE TWELFTH TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY."

VOL. I.
TO THE YEAR 1200.

LONDON:
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P R E F A C E.

THE claims and duties of women have, of late years, attracted general attention ; but although many works, either illustrating the present state of female society in England, or pointing out its future prospects and responsibilities, have appeared, no attempt has been made to exhibit the social and intellectual condition of our countrywomen in past ages. The present day is distinguished by a spirit of historical inquiry, and the study of whatever can throw light on the condition of our forefathers is becoming increasingly popular ; but still it is only a faint and shadowy view that we can obtain of our female ancestors — the women whose powerful influence moulded the charac-

ters of those, to whom we owe our national greatness.

In the course of reading for her former work, "Historical Memoirs of the Queens of England," the interest of the writer was awakened by the many valuable notices of female society, which not only the monkish chronicle, but the legal record, and the household book, supplied; and, when she turned over the pages of many a forgotten Anglo-Norman poet, she discovered, with increased interest, that not to queens alone, but to many a high-born lady, our early literature owed its chief encouragement. Still, as she proceeded in her pleasant task, she found each contemporary remain,—legend, tale, miracle-play, will, inventory, diary,—combined to throw a vivid light, not merely on society during the middle ages, but especially on the condition of woman in England.

Information so interesting and abundant, though as yet so little known, seemed to demand a separate notice; and the outline of the present work then suggested itself to the



writer—a work, which, not confined to the middle ages alone, should trace the progress of female society in England from the earliest period of her history, and illustrate the influence of woman on our civilization and literature.

Important has been that influence. Little is told us of women in Saxon times, yet even then there were illustrious queens, and more illustrious female scholars, whose exertions for the diffusion of knowledge demand the gratitude of their descendants. Scarcely more is known of female society during the Anglo-Norman period; yet it was at the bidding of the lady that our earliest poets sang, and the fountain of modern fiction—chivalrous romance, was unsealed by female hands. During the age of chivalry, the object of knightly worship becomes indeed more distinctly visible; but even at this period many a lady illustrious for her talents, and interesting from her romantic history, has no record save in the seldom-opened pages of the monkish chronicle. Descending to more recent times,

we find the history of women in England linked with each great event. Female influence gave the impulse to those doctrines which produced the Reformation,—to woman's patronage, England owes the introduction of printing,—while amid all the changes of after-times her voice was still heard.

In tracing the progress of woman in England through these various phases of her history, it has been the chief aim of the writer to collect *contemporary* information from every available and authentic source, and thus to present a truthful picture of her countrywomen in past times. The first volume is now offered to the reader, and the second, continuing the history of woman in England to the close of the fifteenth century, will shortly follow.

H. L.

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THE
HISTORY OF WOMAN
IN
ENGLAND.

CHAPTER I.

Britain at the Invasion of the Romans—British Women—
Cartismandua—Boadicea—Extent of the Influence of
the Roman Invasion—Christianity introduced only
among the Romanised Britons—Decline of Roman
Power—The restored British Kingdoms—State of So-
ciety among the later Britons—State of Women among
them—Extracts from the ancient British Laws—The
Arrival of the Saxons.

NINETEEN centuries have now well-nigh
passed away since Britain, but obscurely known
to the ancient world, attracted the notice of
Cæsar. His invasion followed; and, although
the subjugation of a barbarous race could
scarcely add another leaf to the victor's laurel,
he yet boasted the conquest of a land of un-
known extent in the farthest west—of a new.

world—and Rome celebrated, by a festival of twenty days, the event which first brought our country within the circle of the great European family.

It was during his subsequent contests with its inhabitants, that Cæsar obtained the first information as to their social condition. Britain at this period was divided among numerous tribes, subsisting in various degrees of imperfect civilisation—from the woad-stained dwellers in the northern parts, whose only shelter was the cave and only pursuit the chase, to the more advanced inhabitants of the south, who, clad in vest and mantle, possessed ornaments of brass and silver, who had made some progress in agriculture, and who advanced to battle with spear and shield, guiding their well-constructed war-chariots.

Little is known of the condition of the women belonging to the more barbarous tribes; their lot, however, was, doubtless, that which has been always the lot of woman in savage life—that of the drudge and bond-slave: but among the more civilised tribes, the general respect paid to women seems to have awakened the surprise both of Cæsar and Tacitus; and

the latter historian, especially, notices their custom of allowing females, equally with the men, to hold the supreme authority. The women among these tribes were warlike : they advanced to battle, not merely as attendants and spectators, but took part in the conflict ; and so customary was this, that we are told, the gifts received by the bride were not merely oxen, that great source of wealth, but the caparisoned horse, the shield, and the sword.* But the British women were not merely warlike ; they cultivated, successfully, many of the arts of peace. Their baskets were so exquisitely woven of fine grass, that the Roman lady did not disdain to use them ; and their ingenuity in adorning their garments with various kinds of needlework, although their only implement was a rude needle of bone, has been noticed by several historians. The distaff, too, was in use among them, for the fine wool of Britain was celebrated from the time of Cæsar's invasion ; and we are told that they were also skilful in weaving various kinds of cloth.

* Solinus.




It is very questionable whether the superior station assigned to British women was at all attributable to the religion of the country—Druidism. From the little that can be ascertained respecting that ancient and widely spread faith, the priesthood seems to have been confined to the male portion of the community. It was the Arch-Druid who, seated beside the cromlech, and beneath the shadow of his guardian oak, gave forth his mystic oracles ; and it was to his attendant brethren that the performance of the inferior religious rites was assigned. Both Cæsar and Tacitus, however, mention an order of female Druids, but they were most probably merely the relatives of the priesthood, as they appear not to have fulfilled any sacerdotal office. It was this class of women, when Aulus Plautus pursued the retreating Druids as far as Anglesea, who, in garments of mourning, with streaming hair and brandished torches, unavailingly opposed the advance of the Roman legions, and whose appearance excited the terror of a fierce but superstitious soldiery. These, together with their male companions, fell victims to the vengeance of

the conquerors;* and from henceforth we find no further notice of a female class of Druids.

The warlike character of the Britons was severely tested by their Roman invaders; but they fought with persisting valour, and more than a century elapsed ere Rome completely held the southern and eastern portion of Britain in subjection. It is during this period that the first female names in British history meet us. Of the earliest, little is distinctly known, nor is that little creditable to her: Cartismandua—this is, doubtless, her Romanised name—who appears to have been queen in her own right, and reigned over the Brigantes for many years; but, having taken her husband's armour-bearer for her paramour, her indignant subjects deposed her. In this emergency she supplicated aid of the Roman invaders, who sent an army to her relief. This

* Tacitus. Although not engaged in their religious services, a class of women certainly appear to have existed among the Druids, who were believed to foretell future events. When Alexander Severus was setting out on his last expedition, a female Druid cried after him, "Go thy way, neither expect victory nor trust thy soldiers;" and subsequent events proved that the warning was not idly given.



army was repulsed by the Brigantes, and although the queen escaped, she was never able to recover her forfeited kingdom.


The next female name is one well known to the general reader, and deservedly so, as of one who bravely, though unavailingly, fought for freedom—Boadicea, or probably more correctly, Bonduca. The fate of this unfortunate queen was what has unhappily been too common in the history of colonisation, although few treated with equal cruelty have inflicted as severe a revenge. Boadicea was the widow of a king of the Iceni, a powerful race, inhabiting the eastern part of Britain, and her husband at his death bequeathed to her his throne and half his treasures, at the same time constituting the Roman emperor—probably to secure his aid against the neighbouring tribes—joint-heir with his two daughters of the remaining half portion. The imperial procurator, however, seized the whole treasure; and when the widow remonstrated, he caused her to be scourged, and her daughters to be seized and treated as slaves.

The cruelly injured queen loudly proclaimed her wrongs; she collected multitudes

together, to whom she detailed her sufferings; she pointed out the oppressive tyranny to which they were subjected, the heavy taxations imposed on those who had submitted to the Roman yoke, and concluded by denouncing that rapacity which, not content with spoiling the living, "had taxed even the dead."*

Her burning words excited the fiercest emotions in the listening multitude that surrounded her; she then took a hare which she had concealed in her vest, and let it slip, that by its course the attendant Druids, among whom the hare was viewed as a sacred animal, might foretell the result of the enterprise. The

* Her speech, which is given by Dio Cassius, and which, although doubtless made by the writer, may be correct as to the general outline, dwells especially on the heavy taxation imposed on the conquered tribes; and the remark, "we are forced to pay for the bodies of our very dead," has most likely reference to the custom always adhered to by the Britons of burying their dead. Now as we know the Romans always strictly imposed their laws and usages on the people they subjugated, and as burning the dead was among them viewed both as a civil and religious rite, it was, perhaps, only by paying an enormous sum that the higher order of Britons obtained the privilege of interring their chieftains wrapped in their best apparel, and with axe and dagger beside them, as the opened cromlech has so often shewn. The idea of burn-



turnings and windings of the affrighted animal were pronounced of favourable omen—the Druids promised victory; the multitudes shouted aloud, and Boadicea prepared to lead by her valour those whom her resistless eloquence had gathered around her.

The march of the immense but undisciplined army was southward. They soon reached the flourishing city of Camulodunum (Malden), and reduced it to ashes. They next held on, unopposed, toward London, even at this period a wealthy and populous city, but inhabited chiefly by Roman colonists. London shared the same fate as Camulodunum, for a superstitious terror seems to have paralyzing the corpse was peculiarly repugnant to Druidical belief; and late researches have proved how obstinately, during the whole period of Roman sway, the Britons adhered to their ancient burial-rites.

Dio gives rather a vivid picture of the British queen. "She was," he says, "a woman of lofty stature and stern countenance; her yellow hair flowed almost to the ground; she was clad in a parti-coloured vest, gathered round her in thick folds, and a large mantle, while she wore round her neck a gold chain." This was probably the "torque," the most valued ornament of the British chieftain, and a symbol of regal authority. It was a flexible band, composed of three or four rods of fine gold twisted together, and hooked at the ends to fasten it round the neck.

lysed the Romans, and Boadicea and her army passed onward to Verulam, the municipal city; and ere the legions of Suetonius could arrive, its splendid buildings lay a smoking ruin, and the barbarian army was loaded with its spoils. At length the Roman forces combined near London, and offered battle. The site of this desperate but decisive conflict has been variously stated, but the rising ground to the north of London, where, until very lately, the traces of a large Roman encampment were clearly to be seen, was most probably the spot.

Here, at length, the well-disciplined legions of Rome and the barbarian army met, and again Boadicea addressed her people, conjuring them to fight bravely. She reminded them of their late successes, urged them to make one other effort to achieve their freedom, and then, as though prophetic of the result, added, that although the men might choose to live and be slaves, she, a woman, was determined to conquer or to die. The Britons again advanced with shouts; but the Roman legions received the shock firmly, and then, forming a wedge, broke through the large

but unconnected human mass, and fearfully avenged the slaughter of their countrymen. Seventy thousand Romans are said to have been put to death by the Britons in the preceding conflicts;—eighty thousand Britons now fell in this fatal battle. Boadicea, “disdaining to survive the liberties of her land,” drank poison; nor can the historian deny his meed of admiration to the unfortunate queen, who fought and fell with Roman courage.

Severity had been now tried for more than a century; but the native tribes were still only partially subdued. It was reserved for the gentle and far wiser policy of Agricola to effect what the sword had attempted in vain. Under his rule the ruined cities were rebuilt, colonisation was encouraged, commerce protected, and the natives were incited by the display of Roman art and luxury to emulate the civilisation of their conquerors. The Britons were also encouraged to learn the Roman language, and to settle in the Roman towns, where, although the highest offices were exclusively filled by Romans, many of the subordinate were enjoyed by the natives; and we are told that ere long the Britons adopted

both the dress and the customs of the imperial city.

That this was the case in the vicinity of the Roman stations is very probable, and that the Britons who dwelt in the cities—at Londinum or Verulamentum—should have exchanged their rude torques and bracelets, and their ruder utensils, for the delicate jewellery and beautiful pottery, so frequently discovered in the vicinity of the Roman cities, we may well believe,—and that the female Briton adopted the purple-edged robe, and the braided hair, and the brodered sandal of the Roman lady, when she became an inhabitant of a Roman city, is equally probable; but that civilisation chased barbarism to the forests of the north and the west is disproved by the decisive fact, that not a single wood or stream bears a Roman name; not a single Roman superstition has been handed down among the people; not a single allusion to classical mythology, or even to Roman influence, can be found among the British remains; and that scarcely had the Romans finally departed, ere kingdoms with British names, governed by princes also bearing British names, and who

appealed to codes of ancient British laws, arose, and an energetic, imaginative, but uncivilised people held possession of the land, until a ruder, but even more energetic race, chased them away.

A blank almost beyond parallel is the history of the four centuries of Roman domination in Britain. When the historian closes the tale of Boadicea's wrongs and her revenge, he closes the page of British history altogether. Nor are the annals of Roman power much more fully detailed. A mere list of the prefects who successively governed Britain,—slight notices, rather than narratives, of the conflicts of their legions with the northern tribes, are all that his annals afford us, and the deeds of ten generations scarcely supply materials for one short chapter. And yet, during this long period, the Mistress of the World swayed the destinies of our land, and towns rivalling those of France and Italy studded the southern division ; and the graceful forum, the stately temple, the luxurious bath, all the refinements of a most civilised era, were to be found in Britain—all that belongs to the most advanced state of society, except a literature.

The sepulchral urn, the tessellated pavement, the well-sculptured capital, again and again meet our notice ; but the most diligent research of the literary antiquary has failed to discover the least fragment of narrative or legend, song or fable,—aught that can shew us what our forefathers and their haughty masters were during the long period of Roman domination.

It was during this interval that Christianity was first introduced into Britain, but the obscurity that rests upon the national history rests equally upon its ecclesiastical. That the Christian faith spread rapidly among the Roman colonists, and probably among the Romanised Britons, appears certain ; but notwithstanding the boast of an early Christian writer (Tertullian), that “districts inaccessible to Roman arms had yielded obedience to the Saviour,”—that the uncivilised tribes among the natives continued heathens, is proved, both by the slight notices which authentic history affords us, and by the more indirect but still conclusive evidence of saintly legends. “Among the Romans and Romanised Britons of the higher ranks, Christianity was preached with effect. But the country was still unconverted,

and though the bloody sacrifices of the Druids had brought down the anger of the Romans, their mysteries, purified by the abolition of a savage ritual, were perpetuated by the order. Full two centuries after the withdrawal of the Romans, we find Taliessin scarcely concealing his belief in the religion of his forefathers ; and the Druidical worship, still recollected in Strath Clyde and Cumbria, was so strong and vigorous on the opposite shores of Deira, that the Britons not only preserved their priesthood, but induced the Saxon conquerors to embrace their faith ; for the name of Coifi, the pontiff through whose persuasion Edwin king of Northumbria embraced Christianity, was no other than the title of the chief Druid.* Bede in his history instances, that one of the chief causes of the afflictions that befell the land, previously to the invasion of the Saxons, was because the more civilised natives (the Romanised Britons) utterly neglected to preach the Gospel to the heathens around them ; while, that the ancient creed still lingered much later in the remoter parts

* Sir F. Palgrave's "English Commonwealth," vol. i. p. 154.

of the land, is proved by the decrees of many a council, Saxon as well as Welsh, which prohibit, under severest ecclesiastical penalties, the worship of groves and fountains, observances connected with the appearance of the new moon, and the homage still paid to the cromlech—superstitions unknown to the Saxon invaders, and belonging to a far earlier period,—brought perhaps by the earliest inhabitants of Britain from the land of Canaan.

Saintly legend tells the same story; for Lucius the first Christian king, and his first bishops, and St. Alban the first martyr, and his companions—all, from the unquestionable testimony of their names, must have been Romans, or Romanised Britons. Among female names, too, we meet with a Claudia, a beautiful native of Britain, who married a Roman senator, and became active in promoting the Christian faith; and Helena, said to have been the daughter of a British king, but who became wife of the Emperor Constantius, and mother of the more celebrated Constantine—she, who is said to have well-nigh rebuilt Colchester, her native city, and girdled London round with its massive walls, but whose chief celebrity rests on her journey to the East, where the

miraculous discovery of "the true cross" rewarded the toilsome wanderings of the imperial pilgrim.

With the decline of the Roman empire the restitution of British power commenced. The Roman forces, summoned to battle nearer home, left Britain, at the commencement of the fifth century, to the mixed population of the towns and cities, who, rendered indolent by luxury, saw with alarm, not merely the encroachments of the native tribes, but the advances of a new and more ferocious tribe of barbarians, the Picts, who menaced the northern frontier. Taking advantage of the alarm thus occasioned, the Britons united their forces; they deposed the Roman magistrates, took possession of the cities, and then vigorously repulsed the common enemy.

Ere long, although but little can be ascertained as to the precise period, or the circumstances under which those changes took place, a succession of small kingdoms arose, each presided over by a British prince, and claiming to be governed by British laws. The influence of Roman civilisation and luxury passed away with Roman power, for the restored Britons were still a rude people. Although surrounded

by monuments of Roman luxury, and in the vicinity of Roman stations, at least, accustomed to Roman manners, they still clung to their ancient, rude usages, as though civilisation had never visited them. This is forcibly proved in their wild and eloquent poetical remains, where every allusion and every image refers to a people scarcely advanced beyond the stage of pastoral life. The "three heroes of Britain" are characterised as the "three princely bulls:" Arthur rushes like a lion on his foemen, and they receive his attack like raging bears. The gifts that reward the bard are casks of mead and fat kine; while Elphin receives the highest eulogies from Taliessin, for "he gave me wine, ale, mead, and the princely great steeds;" and rising into enthusiasm as he recollects all the princely largess bestowed by his valiant patron, he bids the cup-bearer "fill the horn of honour — the long blue horn, covered not sparingly with silver," and this rude horn is evidently as highly prized as the delicate silver vase, or precious myrrhine cup, had been by the Roman colonist.

In a state of society like this, the situation of women could scarcely be high; and we find

abundant proofs of the inferior station assigned to them in the almost total absence of all allusion, not only to female influence, but even to female society. There is only one instance in which "the lady" is alluded to in these remains, and this is in a poem of Anuerin, where he celebrates his hero as foremost in every place, and as "receiving the portion of mead from the chief lady." That the "chief lady" among the ancient Britons occupied no seat of honour in the rude hall, like the "hlǣdige" of Saxon times, but was merely a duteous attendant on her lordly guests, like the handmaiden of classical story, we have evidence in the songs that celebrate the festive meetings of the British warriors. We read of the mighty feast, the slaughtered kine, the casks of ale and mead, the rude company joyously pledging each other, and draining the horn at a single draught, as they sit round the large fire, but no female society is there.

"This hearth," sings Llywarch Hen, in his pathetic and characteristic elegy on Urien Reged,

"This hearth—deserted by the shout,
More habitual on its floor
Was the mead, and the talking of the mead-drinkers.

This hearth—will it not be covered with sod ?
In the life-time of Owain and Elphin
Its cauldron boiled the prey.

This hearth—will it not be covered with hoary fungus ?
More accustomed around it
The brave ones, dauntless in the sword-stroke.

This hearth—will it not be covered with thorns ?
More accustomed to it the assembled ring
Of Owain's companions.

This hearth—will it not be turned up by swine ?
More accustomed the clamour of men,
And circling horns of the banquet."

And thus, through nine stanzas, the aged bard pours forth his lament over the ruined dwelling and deserted hearthstone, but never making the slightest allusion to her who, among a more advanced people, would have been its chief ornament.

The curious ancient British tales lately published,* exhibit also the inferior station assigned to women. Arthur's wife asks as a favour to be allowed to see the hunting, and she goes, almost wholly unattended; nor do any of the courtiers seem to heed the presence

* "The Mabinogion," edited by Lady Charlotte Guest, one of the most curious and interesting works to the literary antiquary ever published.

of a lady, although that lady was a queen.* Arthur and his knights are represented carousing in the hall, but no ladies are present; and when the young hero of the tale rides into the assembly, the king proffers him meat broiled with pepper, sparkling mead, a soft couch, and "a lady to sit at his head, and sing him to sleep."† The opening of the last story referred to is vividly characteristic of the rudeness of the people. The hero's father, after having been some years a widower, consults with his nobles about taking a second wife. They inform him that the wife of a neighbouring prince would exactly suit him; he therefore makes war on this prince, kills him, and carries off the wife and the property, apparently considering both the lady and the kine merely as "goods and chattels," which, according to the laws of the strong hand, would become the rightful property of him who could take them. Nor does the lady, although


* "Geraint ab Erbin:" Mabinogion, Part III.

† "Kilhwch and Olwen," Ibid. Part IV.: the most curious as well as the most ancient tale that has hitherto appeared in this collection. It is indeed "purely British," and probably not later than the seventh or eighth century.

a queen, appear to feel any indignation at being thus unceremoniously transferred from one owner to another. She quietly takes her place in her new master's house; busies herself in domestic duties, and interests herself in the fortunes of her son-in-law, just like a woman wooed and wedded in a civilised way.

It may be said that the testimony of poetry and fiction is an uncertain guide, but the inquirer well read in the fictions of various nations will know, how vividly the character of the age and people is reflected in the popular tale. In this case, however, the unexceptionable testimony of the ancient British laws can be appealed to; and although the chief collection, termed the laws of Howel Dda, are of no earlier date than between the years 920 and 950, still they expressly claim to be compiled from laws of a very remote antiquity: and internal evidence, as competent witnesses assert, prove this to be the fact.

From these laws we find that the principle of compensation in goods or money for every injury, from the stealing of the household cat, to the forcible abduction of the mistress of



the dwelling; from the breaking of a tooth, to the commission of murder, prevailed as extensively among the Britons, as it subsequently did among the Saxons. As the rate of compensation differed according to the rank of various individuals, we are supplied with an unerring test of the estimate in which each person of the community was held.

The king's fine for various injuries and insults done to him, termed "saraad," was, according to these curious laws, "one hundred kine, a silver rod with three knobs at the top and three at the bottom, which shall reach from the ground to the king's face, when he shall sit in his chair, and as thick as his ring-finger; and a golden cup which shall hold the king's full draught, and as *thick as the nail of a ploughman, when he has ploughed seven years*; and a gold cover, *as broad as the king's face*, and as thick as the edge of the cup."* The queen's fine for "saraad," which

* *Vide* "The Ancient Laws and Institutes of Wales," p. 305. The extract above proves the rude state of society; and the comparative poverty of the Britons, after the departure of the Romans, is proved too by another law, in which "the three things which the king is to keep *all* to himself,"

we are informed might be committed three ways, either "when her protection shall be violated," (this is subsequently explained as "the right to conduct beyond the bounds of the country, without pursuit and without obstruction,") "*when she shall be struck in anger, or when a thing shall be forcibly taken out of her hand!*"—the fine for this most unmanly conduct was to be only "*one third of the king's saraad, the gold and silver excepted!*" Thus, the value of little more than thirty-three cows was all that the queen was entitled to receive for insult unknown to a civilised race.

In the laws regulating the interior arrangements of the palace, abundant proof is given

are "gold and buffalo horns, and garments edged with gold." It is difficult to imagine what became of the treasures of Roman Britain;—if still possessed by the Romanised Britons, how could they have been protected from the ruder and more warlike natives? Who inhabited the towns? is another question as difficult to be answered; for it must be borne in mind, that many of the Roman cities remained in almost their ancient splendour even to the times of the Normans. Malmsbury speaks with admiration of the remains of Bath and Cirencester: and Giraldus Cambrensis, even in 1188, notices the baths and temples, and the *gilded* roofs of the Roman palaces, still to be seen at Caerleon.

of the low station occupied by the queen. While each officer of the king, down to the falconer, has his appropriated place in the hall, the king's wife occupies her solitary chamber, waited upon by a single attendant handmaiden; a steward, who is to "serve her in her chamber with meat and drink;" and a page, who "is to convey messages between the chamber and the hall, keep the keys of her coffers, and supply the chamber;" and two or three inferior attendants.* That in this state of melancholy seclusion the queen should occasionally ask the solace of song, seems to have occurred to the law-makers as no unlikely circumstance; they therefore enact that, "when the queen shall will a song in her chamber, let the bard sing a song respecting Camlan,"

* One of these is her candle-bearer: the reader will smile at his valuable perquisites; for they were "all the tops he shall *bite off* the candles, also the broken bread, and fragments that fall over the queen's dish." No female domestics seem to have been employed in the king's household, except the queen's handmaiden, and the baking-woman, and the laundress. These two last were allowed the right of protection,—the baking-woman, as far as she could throw her kneading-bat; the laundress, as far as she could throw her washing-beetle.

(the battle in which Arthur fell), “and that *not loud, lest the hall be disturbed!*”—lest the amusement of the queen should interrupt that of her servants, the boisterous mead-drinkers carousing round the blazing hearth.


Among a people where the queen was held in such low estimation, we cannot expect to find a woman raised to the supreme power; and thus, from the time of Boadicea to the invasion of the Saxons, we have no instance of a queen reigning in her own right. Nor does it appear that under the restored British sway women were capable of holding lands; they, however, possessed some rights, though very limited, and on the whole, the inferior class of women seem to have possessed more independence than the higher.

On reference to these curious laws, although we find it laid down as an axiom that the value of every woman is one-third of that of her husband, still it appears that, in case of separation by mutual consent, the joint property was very fairly shared between them. The quotation, although long, is too characteristic to be passed over, and it is therefore given.

“If husband and wife separate, the husband


has the swine and the sheep ; if only one kind, to be shared. Goats are to the husband. Of the children, the eldest and youngest to the husband ; the middlemost to the wife. The household furniture shared, but the milking vessels, except the pail, to the wife ; the husband, the drinking vessels and riddle ; the wife, the sieve. The husband has the upper stone of the hand-mill, the wife the lower one. The upper garments are the wife's, the under garments the husband's, and the kettle, coverlet, bolster, fuel axe, settle, and all the hooks except one ; the pan, trivet, axe, bill, ploughshare, flax, linseed, wool, and the house-bag to the wife ; if any gold, it is to be shared between them. The husband to have the corn above ground and under, and the barn, the poultry, and one of the cats ; the rest to the wife. To the wife, the meat in the brine and the cheese in the brine ; those hung up belong to the husband. The butter, meat, and cheese, in cut, belong to the wife ; also, as much meal as she can carry between her arms and knees, from the store-room to the house. Their apparel to be divided."*

* *Vide* "The Ancient Laws and Institutes of Wales,"
p. 38.



It is difficult to ascertain the reasons for the arbitrary division of much of the household stock enumerated in the foregoing extract. That the dairy produce and meat in salt should belong to the wife seems correct enough, because her care was necessary to prevent their spoiling; but that the husband should have all the poultry and the swine, while the sheep fell to the wife's share, appears a singular arrangement. That the eldest child should belong to the father too, might be accounted for, from its standing less in need of maternal care; but that the youngest should also be taken by the father, is an unaccountable anomaly.

According to the same laws, the wife had an exclusive right to her jewellery and wearing apparel: nor was this a trifling boon; for in an early state of society these supplied the place of a current coinage, and the robe, or the mantle, or the bracelet, often purchased food during famine, or supplied a ransom to the captive. From another law we find that the wife of a "privileged man," which seems to mean a *free* man, might lend her "under-garment, mantle, head-cloth, and shoes," (and this was, probably, well-nigh her



whole apparel,) without consent of her husband; and "can give meat and drink unrestrictedly, and can lend the furniture." The wife of the "tæg," or bondsman, could only lend her head-covering; and of her household utensils only "her sieve and riddle," and these but "at the distance she can be heard calling with her feet on the threshold." The reason for these restrictions in regard to the wife of the bondsman was, probably, owing to the fact that the household goods, and even the clothing, were the property of the bondsman's master.

In reflecting on these curious ancient laws, it seems strange to find the middle classes of women in possession of privileges apparently denied to the highest. But this we shall find arose entirely out of the rude state of society. Unacquainted with the refined pleasures of life, engaged in warfare or the chase, the monarch and his nobles sought in the mighty feasts and "the circling horns of the banquet" their chief recreation and solace. Woman, as the companion of their social hour, was unknown, and therefore neglected, and well-nigh forgotten. But among the men actually occupied in agricultural pursuits woman became, in

despite of abstract opinion and long-established usage, a being of indispensable importance. Although no "swords might be ready to leap from their scabbards" to avenge the wrongs or maintain the rights of the fair and noble lady,—although no place of honour was assigned to *her*, and no admiring homage paid, and she sat in her solitary chamber weaving the delicate web or engaged with the distaff, the *housewife* was valued at a higher rate, for on *her* it depended whether the labour of her husband should be in vain. On her devolved the joint care of the cattle and the exclusive care of the dairy ; and the active and laborious wife, like the good milch-cow, could not but be prized, since the comfort of the rude household depended on them both. Woman in the abstract, among our Celtic ancestors, occupied a sufficiently low station ; but individual woman gained that consideration from her useful drudgery which among the Teutonic nations was awarded to her higher qualities, and thus the British law, while it estimated her value at only one-third of her husband's, allowed her an equal participation of his goods.

An impenetrable obscurity rests upon the




about the British kingdoms. From the obscure narrative language of Gildas, as well as from the simple narrative of Bede, we have the names of these little states, and the names of the heroes who fought with each other; but the details of their life have well-nigh vanished; and the accounts are in one or two British manuscripts very scanty. These small fragments of history and civilisation, as well as the names of the descendants of the Romans or the Romanised Britons, who seem to have remained a separate people, although we cannot ascertain on what conditions down to the invasion of the Saxons.* How far these adhered to Roman customs, what was their form of government, what were the peculiarities of their social life, or what the conditions of winter among them, are questions for which we have as yet seen no answer.

* A curious passage in the *Saxon Chronicle* refers to the fact that "There were in the British island five nations: English and Brit. Welsh (Welsh), and Scythians (Scots), and Picts (Picts), and Berlesas (Book-men)." Now these last must unquestionably mean the remnants of the Romans, since every other tribe is distinctly enumerated, and the name assigned is curiously indicative of their mental superiority to the rest.

Meanwhile, war continued with unmitigated fury among the British princes; these wars were succeeded by famine—the natural consequence of long-protracted warfare; and famine, by its equally certain follower, pestilence. This period of severe affliction was seized by the Picts and the Scots to advance yet farther into the land.

At this period the example of the northern barbarians, who had encamped almost within sight of the imperial city, was not lost upon their brethren. Horde after horde, tribe after tribe, emerged from the vast northern hive; all pressing southward, and eager to obtain a share of those hitherto unimagined riches which the flourishing, but unprotected cities of southern Europe seemed to offer to the spoiler. And while some urged their resistless march across the Alps toward northern Italy, others as pirates swept the coasts of France and Spain, and hovered upon the ill-guarded shores of Britain.

Foremost among these pirates, unmatched in valour and in persisting endurance, were the Saxons; and foremost among these, the adventurous brothers, Hengist and Horsa. The



unsettled state of the land—the wretched condition of its inhabitants, rendered Britain an attractive object to these hardy pirates, and they cruised along the Kentish coast with their “three long ships,” uncertain, perhaps, where best to obtain a landing. At this crisis, Vortigern, king of the midland and eastern parts of Britain, pressed by the advancing Picts, sought anxiously for valiant mercenaries to ward off the danger which his own people were unable to do. He invited the aid of the warlike strangers, and the Saxons eagerly accepted his call; Hengist and Horsa entered the Thames, and moored their “three long ships” in the harbour of Ebbesfleet, unconscious that the greatest revolution ever effected in Britain was about to be accomplished by their means.

CHAPTER II.

Invasion of the Saxons—Character of the New Invaders—Their Respect for Women—The Princess of East Anglia—Their Objection to a Female Ruler, Sexburga—The “Cwen”—The “Hlfædge”—Her Prerogatives—The Higher Class of Women—The Proceedings at the Shire-Gemot at Aylston—Wynfleth’s Claim—Wealth of the Saxon Ladies—Weaving and Embroidery—Situation of the Second and Third Class of Females—The Bondswomen—Their Manumission viewed as a Religious Act—Beneficial Influence to the present day of the Saxon Invasion.

THE new invaders of England were a bold and hardy, but ferocious race. Dwelling upon the borders of the German Ocean, and surrounded by hostile tribes, they are described by contemporary writers as the fiercest as well as the bravest of the inhabitants of ancient Germany, and as the most adventurous of pirates. To such a people the conquest of Britain offered every allurements; and we can

scarcely wonder that the unhappy king, who invited their assistance should ere long find, that although the Saxons fought bravely against his adversaries, it was not for his advantage but their own.

We have little authentic information to guide us along this dark period of our history, and we must dismiss all the usual stories which have been related by fabling, or credulous chroniclers who wrote centuries after—even that which describes the charms of Rowena as aiding the sword of her uncle Hengist, and completing the subjugation of the infatuated king.* All that can be known is, that the conquest of Kent by Hengist and Horsa was followed by the arrival of vast numbers of Saxons ; that Ella, another powerful Saxon chief, soon after possessed himself of Sussex ; while within twenty years from that time a


* The common story of the too-fascinating Rowena offering the wine-cup to the easily beguiled Vortigern with the insidious “wæshail,” rests, like most other popular tales, on a very insecure foundation. It is neither mentioned by Gildas the British, nor Bede the Saxon historian, although both flourished not very long after ; but it is, as Dr. Dunham remarks, “first to be found in Nennius, a writer whose history deals largely in fiction, and who did not flourish until four hundred years after.”

more formidable invader, Cerdic, appeared, and compelled the greater portion of the southern coast to submit to his sway.

It was not without a long and bitter struggle that the Britons were subdued. Obscure as is this portion of our history, sufficient can be ascertained to prove that they fought foot by foot for their fatherland ; and the noble lyrics of their bards, whether celebrating the partial conquests, or mourning the defeat or death of their gallant chieftains, afford decisive proofs of the steadfast and energetic valour that marked the death-struggle of British independence.

It is during this period that the authentic Arthur rises to our view—not as the great hero of chivalric romance, but merely as one among the many valiant leaders who fought

The British bards do not mention her, and yet the fabled circumstances of her introduction to the British King are certainly of a kind to have claimed their notice. In the curious and learned work entitled “*Britannia after the Romans*,” the writer considers Rowena to have been a far different character ; the Christian wife of a monarch who leaned strongly toward Druidism, and a queen most anxious to reconcile the British and Saxon tribes to each other.




unavailingly for their native land ; as the successful opponent of Cerdic at the battle of Longborth, as the brave King of the Silures, slain in an untimely strife. It is the traditional Arthur—the creation of the poet,—whose shadowy sceptre swayed the hearts and minds of all Christendom, and whose plastic influence effected more than the mightiest monarch might ever hope to achieve.

Still, the Saxon power continued to advance, and during the whole of the sixth century successive bands descended on the north-eastern coasts ; and when Ida, having subjugated Bernicia and Deira, founded the powerful kingdom of Northumbria, the Britons, cut off from all communication with continental Europe, were compelled to protect themselves amid the forests and mountain fastnesses of the west.

A branch of the great Teutonic family, the Saxons brought with them from the shores of the German Ocean the religion, the laws, and the usages common to that energetic race. Of their religion little can be known ; for it was not until their conversion to Christianity that the Saxons possessed writers, and they were

naturally more willing to pass over the details of their pagan observances than to record them for the information of a distant age. From the scanty notices we can obtain, it appears certain that the system of mythology, known as the Scandinavian, was the basis of their religious faith. Like their kindred tribes they boasted a direct descent from Woden; and that Thor the Thunderer and Freya the Fair-haired, together with their deified ancestor, were objects of their worship, we have the direct testimony of the early Saxon writers: but what were the modifications under which the Scandinavian belief subsisted among them, no writer informs us. Too little information also is afforded to enable us to ascertain what degree of influence their religious opinions exercised on the condition of their women; but that, from the earliest period of their history, woman among the Saxons occupied a station far higher than that assigned to her among the later Britons, is proved by their laws and their usages no less than by the accounts of the later Greek and Latin historians, who remark with astonishment the lofty station maintained by



the Teutonic matron compared with that assigned to women among the polished but degenerate Greeks. "It was in Germany," says the eloquent but accurate Michelet, "that woman became the companion of man in his dangers, united to his destiny in life as in death. She withdrew not even from the battle-field, but watched and hovered over him—the fairy president of the combat—the fair and awful walkyriur, who bore away, as a gathered flower, the spirit of the expiring warrior ;"* and anxiety to prove himself worthy of her applause nerved the arm of the Saxon chieftain in many a perilous conflict, and to deck his bride in the gold and gems of southern climes launched "the long ship" of many an adventurous pirate on the stormy ocean.

And chieftains stood ready to avenge with their sceaxes the wrongs offered to womanly feelings ; and Procopius, polished Greek though he were, recounts with almost sceptical astonishment the story of a princess of East Anglia, whose hand had been promised to a prince of continental Saxony, but who, having been urged by his father on his death-bed to form an alliance

* "Histoire de France," tom. i.

with the sister of a neighbouring king, forsook the fair East Anglian and married his father's later choice. But however calmly a princess of the lower empire might submit to be rejected, the daughter of the barbarian monarch aroused her brother and his companions in arms to avenge the insult that had wooed but not wedded a Saxon maiden; and after preparing an army, they crossed the seas.


Accompanied by the princess, they landed, and leaving a portion of their army to protect her, they pursued the faithless lover, defeated him, and returned in triumph. But she was not yet satisfied, for she demanded that Radiger should be taken captive, that he might meet the reward of his perfidy—death. Again they set forth, again they were successful, and the captive was brought before the insulted princess. He pleaded his father's commands, he besought her pity, he urged every argument that eloquence could use, until the maiden relented; she bade him repudiate the Frankish princess, and ere long became his bride.*

This story, which seemed to a Byzantine

* *Vide* Turner's "History of the Anglo-Saxons," where he introduces the story from Procopius.

historian worthy of especial notice, proves at least, that that high spirit of honour which was the characteristic of the northern nations had its dwelling in the breasts of the fiercest of their tribes ; and that at a period many centuries antecedent to the age of chivalry, warriors' swords could "leap from their scabbards" to avenge the insult offered to maidenhood.

Previously to their establishment in Britain, the Saxons seem to have been under the government of native chieftains, chosen by the voice of the people in open assembly ; and when the various tribes joined to make war on some neighbouring people, or to fit out a piratical expedition, a supreme ruler, or "war-king," was chosen by lot from among these chieftains, and he was obeyed as leader until they returned to their homes. But with the consolidation of Saxon power in England, the office of "Cyning," or king, appears to have superseded that of the chieftain ; and not only was the supreme power conferred for life, but it became, in a modified sense, hereditary. Although the crown was considered to belong to certain families, it was not the heir-loom of



the eldest son, but the second, or the youngest, might be chosen ; or all the sons might be set aside, and an uncle appointed ; or even a third, fourth, or more distant cousin, elevated to the throne by the voice of the people.

It seems rather singular that, among a nation which treated women as equals, we should find no instance of a female member of the royal family being raised to the supreme power. From the period when Hengist moored his "three long ships" in the haven of Ebbesfleet, to that when Harold and Saxon dominion expired on the field of Hastings, but one female name meets us in their annals—that of Sexburga, the widow of Coimwalch, king of Wessex, who, on her husband's decease in 672, seized the crown, and at the head of a powerful army overawed the neighbouring princes. But this attempt, although we have the testimony of more than one monkish writer that Sexburga was well qualified by her superior talents for government, appears to have awakened the most violent spirit of resistance. Her own subjects joined with the neighbouring and rival princes, and within a twelvemonth drove her from the throne.

It seems strange that the Saxons of the seventh century should have revolted from that sway to which their descendants in the sixteenth century willingly submitted, and to which we, at the present moment, yield homage; the reason must, therefore, be sought in their adherence to the principle which guided their election of their chieftains—fitness for warfare. It was the wisdom necessary for the battle-field to which the rude and warlike Saxon referred, when he designated his ruler "Cynyng," or the "wise one;" and although women in earlier periods occasionally accompanied the men to battle, after the Saxons' settlement in England they seem to have withdrawn to more fitting and more congenial employment. Another reason may be offered, too, for the determined resistance to the Queen of Wessex. She had *seized* the crown, and this alone, among a people so jealous of the right of popular election, would have been fatal to the claim of the boldest and bravest warrior.

But although we do not meet with reigning queens in this portion of our history, we find that the wife of the monarch enjoyed numerous and important privileges. During the earlier

period she was crowned, and occupied a place beside her husband on the throne; but Eadburga, the daughter of Offa, king of the Mercians, having, it is said, poisoned her husband Brihtric, king of Wessex, the witenagemot, or supreme assembly, determined, with a strange notion certainly of retributive justice, to abolish the title "Cwen," and to forbid the coronation of the future queens-consort.

The withdrawment of the title does not, however, seem to have affected the real power of the "Cwen." She still was able to hold lands, to appoint to specific offices, and what will appear singular, indeed, to modern readers, to take her place in the witenagemot, and subscribe her name, "I the Lady," the title by which she was in later times designated, immediately after that of the king.*

On the state of the higher classes of women

* *Vide* Turner, who has given many instances; to which may be added that mentioned by Malmsbury, of a witenagemot held by Edgar, at which his mother, Alfgiva, was present; and one held by Canute, at which Emma his queen, and "the bishops and nobles of England," assisted.—*Vide* Matthew of Westminster. Some instances may also be seen in Ingulphus, and the history of Ramsey Abbey.


among the Saxons, we can obtain important information from contemporary sources, both from the specific statements of legal documents, and from the incidental notices of the chronicle. From these we find, to use the words of Mr. Turner, that "they were allowed to possess, to inherit, and to transmit landed property; that they were present at the witenagemot and the shire-gemot; they were permitted to sue and be sued in the courts of justice; and their persons, their safety, their liberty, their property, were protected by express laws."—"That the Anglo-Saxon ladies both inherited and disposed of property as they pleased, we have many instances. A wife is mentioned who devised land by her will, with consent of her husband, in his lifetime. We read also of land that a wife had sold in her husband's lifetime. Widows selling property is also of common occurrence; so is the incident of women devising it. That they inherited land is also clear, for a case is mentioned wherein there being no male heir the estate went to a female. Women, too, appear as tenants *in capite*, in Domesday."*

The transfer of lands at this early period

* Turner, "Hist. of the Anglo-Saxons."

does not appear to have been attended with many legal formalities : there is a curious account of a Saxon lady, in Canute's time, whose son was anxious to obtain possession of her property ; and as the passage is illustrative both of the legal usages of the period and of the independence of the Saxon women, it shall be given.

A shire-gemot, or county-court, was held at Aylston, in Herefordshire, and there were assembled the bishop, the ealderman, the son of the ealderman, the sheriff, and all the theyns of the county. "To this gemot Edwin came, and spake against his mother concerning some lands. The bishop asked who would answer for her, and Thurcil the White said he would, if he knew the complaint, but that he knew it not. Three theyns were then shewn where she lived, and rode to her and asked her what dispute she had about the lands for which her son was impleading her. She said she had no land which belonged to him, and was angry, *earl-like*, against her son. She called Leofleda, her relation, the wife of Thurcil the White, and before them thus addressed her :—' Here sits Leofleda, my kinswoman ; I give thee both my



lands, my gold, and my clothes, and all that I have, after my life.' She then said to the theyns, 'Do theyn-like, and relate well what I have said to the gemot, before all the good men, and tell them to whom I have given my lands and my property, but to my own son nothing; and I pray you to be witness of this.' And they did so, and rode to the gemot and told all the good men there what she had told them. Then stood up Thurcil the White in that gemot, and prayed all the theyns to give his wife the lands which her relative had given her; and they did so; and Thurcil the White rode to St. Ethelbert's minster, by all the folks' leave and witness, and left it to be set down in one Christ's book."*

An extract from a manuscript charter, which Mr. Turner has given, is also worthy of notice, as corroborating his assertion that ladies, (probably as large landholders) sat in the shire-gemot, or county-court.

"And Wynfleth led her witnesses before the king. An archbishop, a bishop, an ealdorman, and the *king's mother*, were there. These were all to witness that Alfrith had given her

* Hickee's "Thesaurus."

the land. The king desired that the men should be assembled in the shire-gemot; he then sent his seal to this gemot by an abbot, and greeted all the witan there: two bishops, an abbot, and all the shire, were there. The archbishop sent his testimony, and the bishop, and they told her she must claim the land for herself. Then she claimed her possessions with the aid of the *king's mother*. An abbot, a priest, an etheling, eight men, *two abbesses, six other ladies*, and many other good theyns and women, were there, and she gained her suit."

The wealth and state of the high-born Saxon women seems to have been little inferior to that of the Anglo-Norman. Like the British females, the Saxon ladies seem to have possessed unquestioned right to the clothes, jewels, and plate, which had belonged to them previously to marriage, and, what the former do not seem to have possessed, full power of disposing of them by will. And the value and number of these garments and jewels would surprise the modern reader, who perhaps is scarcely aware that, at an early and unsettled period of society, plate, but especially jewels, were valued

not alone for their intrinsic beauty, or as designating high station, but as forming a most useful species of money, easily concealed or carried away, and easily convertible in any part of Europe into the current coin. Necklaces adorned with gems, gold chains, broaches, crosses, bands for the head, and bracelets, apparently of great weight and value, meet us in the wills of Saxon high-born women. The bracelet, however, was a favourite, and apparently a universal ornament among noblemen also; for the attendants of Beowulf, in the fine poem that bears that name, are designated as "lords of the bracelet;" and in a Saxon will we find the testator, while he bequeaths to a lady a bracelet of thirty gold mancus weight, leaves to his lord one weighing eighty.

Although the dress of the high-born lady chiefly consisted of fine woollen or linen, still, even at this early period, we find occasional mention of silk. The peculiar style of the Saxon dress, consisting of long and flowing garments, and which were worn by men as well as by women, was probably the origin of the early superiority of the Saxon women, especially the high-born, in the arts of weaving and embroi-

dery. That in weaving, even so early as the commencement of the seventh century, they had attained to some perfection, is proved by a passage from one of Aldhelm's Latin poems, where he speaks of "the shuttles, filled not with purple only but with various colours, moved here and there among the thick spreading threads;" and he alludes, in another passage, to woven borders. But there were few garments of the higher classes that were not also embroidered. The before-mentioned Aldhelm had a robe—his episcopal robe, probably—"made of a most delicate thread of purple, adorned with black circles and figures of peacocks;" this was not improbably the gift, as well as the work, of the convent maidens to whom he addressed his poem.

In the convents, indeed, both weaving and embroidery were pursued with great delight; and a council, in the seventh century, deemed it necessary to exhort the nuns to spend their time in the more instructive exercises of reading, studying, and singing the service, rather than in the less profitable pursuits of "weaving and working garments of empty pride in diversified colours." This prohibition, how-


ever, did not extend to the laity, and thus we find that nearly all the noble and royal women of Saxon times were engaged in embroidery, and many a king's coronation robe was adorned with golden eagles, or diversified foliage, by the taste and skill of his queen.

Of the middle and lower orders of Saxon women we can learn but few particulars. Although an hereditary aristocracy did not exist among the Saxons, they recognised various ranks; and prohibited by custom, if not by express law, intermarriage of the higher with the inferior. Four classes were recognised among them; the etheling or noble, the free or landholders, the freedmen (these probably answered to our working classes), and the bondsmen, consisting of those who had been taken captive in war, or who had incurred the loss of freedom as a punishment for crime.

Of the females belonging to the second and third classes, our notices are very few. Probably they consisted of but few individuals compared with the servile class; and as, although it is likely they lived in comparative comfort, they had few gifts to bequeath to the neighbouring monastery, the record of their

unobtrusive but useful lives has wholly passed away. The easy labour of the distaff, and the more difficult employment of the loom, doubtless formed their chief occupation; and not improbably, in some instances, might aid in providing for the family: but at this early period there was scarcely a market for home produce, since the nobles among their extensive households numbered every species of workman and workwoman, from the smith and the carpenter, the weaving and sewing maiden, to the woodcutter and the grinding slave who toiled at her rude hand-mill to grind corn for the family.

But although we seek in vain for those pictures of domestic life, or those minute traits that might bring female society in Saxon times vividly before us, from the unexceptional testimony of the laws we find that each class of women not only enjoyed legal protection, but that the protection afforded to females was insured by a *double* fine. The principle of pecuniary compensation for injury is the leading feature of Saxon jurisprudence. Each individual had the protection of the *were* and the privilege of the *mund*. The first of these, the



were, was the legal valuation of the person, varying according to his situation in life ; “ If he was killed, it was the penalty his murderer had to pay for his crime ; if he committed crimes, it was the penalty which, in many cases, he had to discharge.”* The *mund*, or *mundbyrd*, was the right of protection—of civil protection — “ the principle of the doctrine that every man’s house is his castle ;” and this, like the *were*, varied according to the class to which each belonged. Thus, on reference to the oldest code of Saxon laws extant, that of Ethelbert, king of Kent, we find the king’s *mundbyrd* guarded by a penalty of fifty shillings, while that of an earl’s was estimated at twenty. But superior protection was granted to women, and thus the *mundbyrd* of the earl’s widow was the same as that assigned for the king himself, and that for the woman of the second class was the same as for the earl. For the woman belonging to the third class, the *mund* was *twelve* shillings, the sum assigned for the man of the second class ; while for the bondswoman the *mund* was six, the same price as that of the ceorl. If a widow was carried away from her

* Dunham.

dwelling against her consent, the compensation was to be double her *mund* ; and forcible marriages were prohibited under the severest penalties, ecclesiastical no less than civil. From the laws of King Ina, we learn that a ceorl's widow was allowed the guardianship of her child until it was of age, the kindred taking care of the paternal possession, and allowing her a fixed sum for its maintenance. In the laws of King Canute a curious passage occurs, which proves that the wife, even among the lower classes, was considered as having an exclusive right to her domestic stores. "If any man bring a stolen thing home to his cot, and he be detected, it is just that the owner should have what he went after. And unless it has been brought under his wife's *key-lockers*, let her be clear ; for it is her *duty* to keep the key of them, namely, her store-room, her chest, and her cupboard. If it be brought under any of these, then she is guilty ; but no wife may forbid her husband that he may not put into his cot what he will."*

Of the condition of the largest class of females, the bondswomen, we can obtain very little


* *Vide* "The Ancient Laws and Institutes of England," p. 180.

information ; but while the situation of the *bondsmen* appears to have been most degraded, there is great reason to believe that that of the female slaves was comparatively comfortable. In a rude age, when laws are weak, and society unsettled, and even a subsistence often most difficult to obtain, the "theow" under the protection of a kind master actually remained more secure, and certainly more assured of a provision, than the small holder of land or the free servant. Now the female theow was not only secure of these, but, from the very offices she was called to fill, could scarcely fail to become an object of kindness, probably even of affection, to her mistress.

To the female slave the young heir of the family was consigned in his infancy. She also watched over the younger children ; she nursed the mistress of the household in sickness, and participated in her cares ; wove the hangings for the hall, or prepared the wool for the distaff. She was the *home* servant — an emphatic phrase ; for among every nation we shall find *domestic* slavery characterised by mitigations and benefits, from which colonial slavery is wholly exempt.

Still the Saxons were a haughty and a free people, and obscure as their political views might be, they ever considered bondage as a galling yoke ; and thus, by a most beneficial anomaly, while the law determined that the “esne, or theow,” and all he possessed, belonged to his lord, it yet granted him the important privilege of purchasing his own freedom. It is probable that to Christianity the bondsman owed this priceless boon ; to the ceaseless exertions of those excellent men, who, while they preached the Gospel as the “power of the world to come,” preached it also as the unfold of all those pure and benignant principles which, viewing the family of man as one great brotherhood, claims equal rights for all.

And from the period of the introduction of Christianity, we find the manumission of the theow very frequently directed by will. “Let Wulphare be freed,” says Wynfleda, in her curious and interesting will ; “and let Wulflead be freed, on the condition that she follow Ethelfleda and Eadgifa her daughters ; and let Gerburg be freed, and Miscin, and the daughter of Burhulf at Cinnuc, and Elsig, and his wife and his eldest daughter, and



Ceolstane's wife." And she directs that three theows on another manor, and sixteen, chiefly females, belonging to two other manors, shall also receive their freedom.*

But the exercise of benevolent feelings alone seems also often to have prompted the manumission of the slave; and the stranger sometimes laid down the price to the lord, which the bondsman was unable to pay. "Here appeareth in this Christ's book, that Siwine, the son of Leofwic at Lincumb, hath bought Sydelfleda out with five shillings to perpetual freedom," is an entry in an ancient church book; and another records, "that Aluric, the canon of Exeter, redeemed Reinold and his children, and all their offspring; and Aluric called them free and sacless in town, and from town, for God's love."

By these and similar methods a great portion of the Saxon theows seem to have obtained their liberty, even previously to the Norman conquest. Still, from the testimony of Domesday Book, their number was great; and to the encouragement offered by the Con-

* Hickes.

queror to settlers in his walled towns, and to the protection afforded there, we must look for the eventual extinction of English slavery.


On reference to the social habits of the Saxons, we shall still find that the respect conceded to women by their laws extended to their every-day life. Although a rude, and in the earlier periods of their history a savage people, the Saxons never excluded women from their feasts or their amusements. The queen took the place of honour in the festive hall, and presented the mead-cup to the most honoured of the guests, as the highest mark of distinction they could receive. Thus, when Beowulf entered King Hrothgar's "mead hall," the queen Waltheowa, "encircled with gold, mindful of her high station, greeted the warriors in the hall," and presented the cup, and then taking her seat beside her husband remained "while the cup continued to flow, the song to arise, and the revelry to increase." And thus in the monkish chronicles we read of high-born ladies presiding at splendid feasts given by them to the monarch and his numerous retinue; and lady-abbesses, too, welcoming their clerical and

royal guests to the noble banquet ; and thus many a rude illumination exhibits the male and female guests seated alternately round the well-covered table, engaged in conversation or listening to the songs of the minstrel. Would that some of these songs had come down to us, that we might bring our Saxon forefathers more vividly in their every-day life before us ; but, unfortunately, the few remains of their vernacular literature consist chiefly of paraphrases of Scripture, or battle-songs ; and even the sole narrative poem that has been preserved,—that noble epic as it might well be called,—*Beowulf*, scarcely introduces a female character. Future researches may, perhaps, be more successful ; and we may, perchance, recover some one of their many songs—songs which *Malmsbury*, even in his time, nearly a century after the Norman conquest, tells us “ were yet sung in the streets.”

A mighty race were the Saxons : barbarous and ferocious indeed, even beyond the barbarism and ferocity of their kindred tribes, they yet brought with them principles which laid the foundation of all the future advancement and civilisation of our land. They

spread over it like a desolating torrent, but a harvest sprung up from the subsiding waters, rich with benefits to remotest regions.

It is interesting to contemplate the Saxon invasion, in contrast with that of the Romans. Rome, for five centuries, held barbarian Britain in subjection. She built stately cities, reared massive walls, and intersected the whole land with her admirable roads—all that material power could accomplish, she did. But Rome withdrew her sway, and a period of gross barbarism succeeded; and as the monuments of her greatness decayed, the very remembrance of her empire faded away. A rude race took possession of the land; and the ruder Saxons succeeded the rude Britons. But these rude Saxons brought from their pine-forests principles, social and political, which have laid the foundation of our present greatness, and the elements, the essential elements of that tongue which will, ere long, be the birth-tongue of half the civilised world. How would the history of Britain, under the Romans, even could we possess it in its most interesting form, sink into insignificance, as viewed in connexion with its after results,



when compared with the history of our land under the rude Saxons ! The Romans reared splendid temples and stately palaces, but they have crumbled into dust ; the Saxons gave us laws and a language which have become the proud birthright of dwellers in the uttermost parts of the earth.

CHAPTER III.


The earlier Saxon period—The Preaching of Christianity—Influence of Women—The first Saxon Convents—St. Hilda—Caedmon—Princess Elfleda—St. Etheldreda—Abbess Hildelitha—St. Aldhelm's Works addressed to her and her Nuns—Abbess Eadburga—St. Boniface's Correspondence—Loebgitha's Letter—Life of St. Willibald, the earliest work of an English Female Writer—Specimens—Invasion of the Danes—Destruction of the Female Monasteries—Ethelburga, wife of King Ina—Eadburga—Judith, her Coronation Service.

ALTHOUGH from the period of the invasion of Ida, Britain had been well-nigh brought beneath the yoke of the Saxons, still her native princes, from time to time, maintained an unequal conflict with the invaders, and harassed, though they could not drive them from the land. At the beginning of the seventh century, the Britons, under their king, Cadwallo, possessed themselves of many Saxon towns; and in their capture of York, the great northern metropolis, anticipated the fulfilment of that bardic prophecy, so long and so fondly

clung to by their descendants, that the dragon of Cadwallo should at length drive away the hosts of the pale-faced strangers. At this crisis, Oswald, king of Northumbria, collected his forces, and defeated the Britons so completely, that the British standard was never again raised; and when, subsequently, he was acknowledged as Bretwalda, we are told that Britons, as well as Saxons and Picts, joined in the recognition.

Saxon power from henceforth was firmly established, and although divided into numerous little states, waging fierce and almost incessant wars with each other, still the Saxon language was the common speech of the people, and Saxon laws the basis of their common institutions.

It was during the latter period of the Saxon and British contest that the land in which they dwelt again attracted the notice of Rome, and a second time was civilisation and learning proffered to Britain from the same source from whence she had first received them. But a more important boon was at the same time proffered to the barbarian Saxons—the blessings of Christianity.



The story of Gregory, justly surnamed the Great, has been often, but not too often told. While but a Benedictine monk, he one day saw in the market-place at Rome three children, "white as milk," as his biographer describes them, standing to be sold as slaves. He gazed earnestly and admiringly at that dazzling beauty of complexion which, among the Romans, was especially considered as a token of high birth, and he asked of what country they were. "Angles and idolaters," was the reply. "Nay, angels, rather, were they but Christians," cried the kind-hearted monk.

"The earnest sire

His questions urging, feels in slender ties

Of chiming sound commanding sympathies.

DE IRIAN—he would save them from God's IRE.

Subjects of Saxon Ælla, they shall sing

Glad Alleluias to the Eternal King!"

WORDSWORTH.

Nor was the benevolent interest thus awakened in the heart of Gregory a transient emotion. He besought permission of the Pope to visit the land of the Angles as a missionary, and had even set out on his journey; but the Roman people, among whom he was greatly

beloved, clamoured so loudly for his recall from an enterprise which they feared would expose him to danger, that he was compelled to return. The conversion of the Angles, however, was still foremost in Gregory's thoughts; and years after, when advanced to the pontificate, he appointed a company of priests, under the superintendence of Augustine, to proceed to England and preach the Gospel.

The little band journeyed on, not without fear, for the Saxons were a fierce and a blood-thirsty people, and their language was rude and unintelligible; and Gregory had to address letters of advice and encouragement to them, ere they ventured to cross the sea.

They landed in Kent, where, as the queen of Ethelbert was a Frankish princess, and a Christian, they were sure to find interpreters, and probably friends, and they sent a message to the king, detailing their object. Ethelbert summoned them to his presence, and, with silver cross and banner, and singing the Litany, they advanced, and declared their message. The answer of Ethelbert was wise and kind,—
“Your promises are great, but, as they are new to me, I cannot forsake the customs of my

nation. The distance you have travelled for our sakes, and your desire to impart to us what you believe to be the truth, entitle you to our hospitality. You shall be supplied with food, nor shall we forbid your preaching to others."

Protected thus by the king, they took up their residence at Canterbury, and ere long Gregory the Great had the happiness to hear that the king of Kent, and the greater portion of his subjects, had become Christians.*

From Kent, Christianity advanced into Essex, and Sebert its king received baptism. From thence, by slower degrees, it penetrated to Northumbria; the powerful kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex next received the light of the Gospel; and, last of all, the little kingdom of Sussex. In this kingdom no less than seven thousand families of Britons are said to have resided, all reduced by the Saxons to hopeless slavery. St. Wilfred, the first bishop of Selsey,† being appointed to that see, gave the first example of that Christian benevolence, of which the clergy of this period afford so many illustrious proofs, by restoring all the bondsmen on his lands, amounting, it is said, to many hundreds, to freedom.‡

* Bede.

† Ibid.


‡ Ibid.

Over the mission in England, Gregory watched with paternal care to the day of his death. He sent books, and church vestments, and various useful articles, and constantly urged in his letters the importance of making civilisation go hand in hand with Christian instruction.* And a welcome reception was afforded to these missionaries and their message, especially among the female population, whose earnest zeal and active devotion are pleasingly described in many of Augustine's letters to his patron.

Although much error and many superstitions mingled with the instruction afforded by these worthy men, still there was far less of error in the teachings of the early missionaries of the Latin church than will be found in later times. The Saxon church, indeed, presented, in many respects, almost a Protestant character, and in none more so than in the earnest endeavours of its members to promote a knowledge of the Scriptures among the people.


To this all-important object the energies of many an illustrious Saxon scholar were directed

* *Vide* St. Gregory's correspondence in his collected works.



—even of king Alfred himself; and while the translation of the Gospel of St. John, in dictating the last words of which the Venerable Bede expired, takes its place as well-nigh the first specimen of Saxon vernacular literature, the translations from Scripture, with the curious rythmical commentary of Ormin, forms almost the closing utterance of the same tongue.

But at the period when Christianity was first preached in Saxon England, the people do not appear to have possessed a *written* language: Latin was, therefore, of necessity taught in the schools and spoken in the convent; and as the key to all the stores of knowledge possessed by the ecclesiastics, the sole teachers at this dark period, we cannot wonder that it was so highly esteemed. It was, consequently, chiefly for the purposes of instruction, that the various conventual institutions of this period were founded, since there alone could the precious volumes, collected with so much cost and care, be preserved; and there alone, free from the tumults of a barbarous and unsettled age, could the teacher pursue his important calling; and only in the seclusion of the convent could the native youth, free from every injurious associa-



tion, be trained for missionaries among their pagan brethren. But other, though more indirect benefits, were also conferred by the conventual establishments of Saxon times. The improved style of building, and the superior system of agriculture, that, while sterility stretched around, planted flourishing orchards, and rich corn-fields, and fair gardens filled not with medicinal herbs only, but with "the snow-white lily and the blushing rose," as Alcuin describes them, gave proof more cogent than argument of the advantages of civilisation.

And many were the softening influences, too, that went forth from thence among a rude but imaginative people: the paintings that told to the eye what the teacher might with difficulty have explained to the ear; the domestic utensils, the church ornaments, which brought before the rude dwellers in the thorpe or the vill the refinements of a polished race; and the rich choral music, listened to with such entranced delight by their converts—music which centuries after had power to reach the heart of the stern and haughty Canute, when he bade his rowers draw nearer the shore, as the sweet sounds floated along the mere,

and he celebrated in untaught but heartfelt rhyme the pleasant chant of the monks of Ely.*

The early Saxon monasteries were distinguished by a peculiarity apparently common to them only; this was, that although establishments for men as well as women, they were mostly under the rule of a female superior. "In the vicinity of the female convent another was erected for men—canons, whose duty it was to officiate at the altar and perform outdoor offices. The abbess had the supreme command, their prior depended on her choice, and was bound to regulate his conduct by her instructions."†


* "Merrie sungen the muneches binnen Ely
Tha Cnut cing reuther by :
Roweth cnights noer the land
And here we thes muneches sang."

GALE, vol. iii. p. 505.

These original rhymes of the Danish monarch are, as the reader may perceive, perfectly intelligible more than eight centuries after the death of their composer—another proof how wholly Saxon, in all its essential parts, is our language. Would that the list of relics, and of Canute's royal gifts, had been left out of this curious chronicle, and the remainder of this heartfelt song preserved instead.


† Lingard.

This departure from the usual ecclesiastical rule seems to have excited much surprise among the writers who have noticed it, and they declare themselves unable to assign a reason. Two reasons may, however, be given. In the first instance, we should bear in mind that nearly all the monasteries—we might, indeed, say *all*, if we confine our attention to those founded during the seventh century—were founded by *women*, and by women of royal birth. Now with that strong feeling of respect for high rank, which, as we have seen, the Saxons possessed, it must have been less repugnant to their notions of fitness that the lady-abbess, of royal descent, should rule the priory of canons as well as her own sisterhood, than that she, the daughter, or sister, perhaps, of the reigning monarch, should submit to the sway of the mere freeman, or, it might be, actually of him whose parents had been bondslaves. But a more weighty reason may probably be found in the superior fitness of the high-born Saxon women for conventual rule, which, after all, was but domestic rule, exercised in a wider sphere, than of the men, who, though equally high-born, had been



trained up to consider war and the chase as their sole occupations.

Placed at the head of a household consisting, perhaps, of more than a hundred office-bearers and serfs, the "lady" among the Saxons, as her very name, "hlfædge," loaf-giver, implied, was the person to whom each member of the family looked, not only for his general comfort, but for his daily bread. While the king, and his earls, and his theyns, were absent, engaged in war, or following the chase, or carousing over the mead-cup at home, it devolved on the wife or the daughter to provide the household both with food and clothing, and to exercise that continued superintendence which domestic cares must always demand. The elements, therefore, of a wise and efficient conventual rule were already developed in the character and habits of the high-born women of the Saxon period; and even the instruction that was necessary to qualify them for the higher duties of their office would be received less reluctantly by the lady accustomed to sedentary pursuits, and to quiet and retired occupation, than by the noble, educated to regard personal strength



and courage as the highest endowments. Nor inappropriate was it that the community, which was to know nought of war and tumult, should be ruled by a female hand,—that the institution, where the members were to view each other as the brethren and sisters of one common family, should yield submission to that gentle sway, which had been associated with the fondest recollections of their childhood and home.

The history of the Saxon monasteries, interesting as it is in many points of view, is peculiarly important in a work devoted to the history of female society, since not only were the most illustrious of these schools of learning founded and presided over by women, but these women were themselves, pre-eminently, lights in a dark age.

The earliest, and one of the most eminent of these establishments, was the Abbey of Whitby, and foremost among an illustrious sisterhood must be placed the name of its foundress, the Lady Hilda. Like most conventual superiors of the Saxon period, Hilda was of royal birth, the daughter of Prince Herewic, nephew to Edwin, king of Northum-

bria, and the Lady Breguswith. Her place of birth is unknown, but the date of her birth was 614, and the 25th of August was kept, for many centuries, as her anniversary. The poetry of early superstition, which consecrated so many a spot to the memory of the Lady Hilda, has told the fanciful story how that previously to her birth, her mother dreamed that she discovered a priceless gem, which emitted a glorious light, and illumined the whole country far around, and that this gem, she was told, typified the future renown of her unborn child.


Of Hilda's early life little is known, save that her childhood was passed in East Anglia—her mother being related to the East Anglian king, and her elder sister Hereswyth having married an East Anglian prince,—and that the whole family were pagans. By whom, and under what circumstances, Hilda was converted to the Christian faith, is unknown. It was probably by the preaching of Paulinus, the venerable missionary of Northumbria, since she received baptism from his hands at York in 627, when her uncle Edwin, and many of his nobles also, were received into the Christ-

ian church. It is rather a singular circumstance, that on this occasion Hilda was allowed to retain her pagan name, since it was the name of the Saxon goddess of war; perhaps Paulinus observed the energetic character of his young catechumen, and pledged her by her warlike name to a life-long contest, not against her brother man, but against the powers of evil; and if so, well did the Christian Hilda "fight the good fight."

The same obscurity which rests on her childhood rests upon the history of her youth; all we can learn is, that on the death of Edwin in 633, at the battle of Hatfield Chase, the ferocious Penda advanced into Northumbria, and exercised the utmost cruelty on the Christian inhabitants. Many were massacred, some fled, and among these, the widow of Edwin, who with some of her children, and accompanied by Paulinus, sought refuge with her cousin Eadwald, king of Kent. Hilda probably accompanied her, as we find no further notice of her, until the peaceful accession of Oswald to the throne of Northumbria, after his defeat of Eadwald. On this occasion the worthy princess was distressed at the barbarism and paganism


of his subjects, sent for Aidan, a most devoted missionary, from Icolmkill, to instruct them, and we soon after find Hilda among his most illustrious pupils. It was probably from Aidan that Hilda received the learning which was necessary to qualify her for her important station, and in Northumbria she remained, still "wearing the secular habit," according to Bede, until she was thirty-three years of age.

Meanwhile King Oswald fell, as his uncle had fallen, in battle against Penda; his brother Oswy succeeded, and Hilda now determined to follow the example of her sister Hereswyth, who, on the death of her husband, had retired to a convent in France. In pursuance of this plan she proceeded to the East Anglian court, to ask a passage thither; her request was, however, either rejected or postponed, and after nearly a year's suspense, her tutor Aidan sent to invite her to form a monastic establishment in her own country. "A small portion of land, sufficient for one family," says Bede, was selected on the north bank of the Were, and here the Lady Hilda commenced a life, not of indolent ease, or of formal devo-



tional services, but of active and intelligent benevolence.

In this small establishment females alone appear to have resided ; but when, in the following year, Hilda took the superintendence of the abbey of Heretru, or Hartlepool, the convent included canons as well as nuns. In this abbey she remained several years, her fame increasing as her active virtues became more widely known ; and here she appears to have established those schools, which rendered her third and largest convent so illustrious. During this period, as well as subsequently, she is represented by her principal biographer, Bede, who doubtless received his information from her pupil and successor, Elfleda, as exercising a most beneficial superintendence over her large establishment, “ instructing them in the strict observance of justice, piety, chastity, peace, and charity.” Nor did her efforts end here ; she became the general adviser of all who sought her aid, and not only persons of inferior station, but thanes and princes ; even Oswy, the wise and powerful Bretwalda of the Saxon




monarchs, often guided himself by her counsels.

The victory which Oswy obtained in 655 over Penda, the scourge of the Saxon Christians, was the cause of Hilda's removal to that abbey so closely connected with her name, Whitby. Previously to the battle, Oswy vowed that if he obtained the victory, he would send his infant daughter to the abbess Hilda, to be educated as a nun. This vow he now determined to fulfil, and he consigned the little princess to the care of Hilda, with a grant of two hundred and fifty hides of land, half in Bernicia, and half in Deira.*

As a larger monastery was now needed, Hilda removed to Streonshalk, and there built the monastery, in after years known as the abbey of Whitby, and thither, in the year 658, her whole family removed. Little of the splendour of the later monastic institutions seems to have marked the residence of the Lady Hilda. That it was of immense extent, probably consisting of a numerous collection of separate buildings, is certain, not merely

* The *hide* is considered by the best authorities to have consisted of from 100 to 120 acres.



from the number of scholars that resided there, and the strangers who found lodging, but from its being the place where the great ecclesiastical council in 664 held its meeting ; but that it was built of costlier materials than wood, and perhaps rubble, is improbable—even that the church itself possessed the luxury of glass windows is questionable, since Benedict the bishop, a contemporary of Hilda, and an officer in King Oswy's court, was the first to introduce both stone-masonry and glass windows into the ecclesiastical buildings of his country.* But in whatever of comfort or splendour the abbey of Whitby might be deficient, it could boast advantages far surpassing those of mere luxurious enjoyment ; and we are told that students from distant parts flocked to its celebrated schools to obtain that learning which was scarcely to be found elsewhere. Over these schools, the same venerable authority informs us, the abbess Hilda watched with unceasing care, for “ she obliged all those who were under her rule to attend much to reading of the Holy Scriptures, and to questions of morality, so that

* Malmesbury.




many might there be found fit to serve at the altar." And Bede exultingly adds, that no fewer than six scholars, who eventually obtained episcopal chairs, were among the pupils of the Lady Hilda. These were Bosa, John of Beverley, and the second Wilfred, all of whom successively filled the See of York; and Hedda, bishop of Wessex, and Tatfrid, and Oftsen, successively bishops of Worcester; and besides these, a numerous band of missionaries, who went forth to spread civilisation and literature, as well as religion, among their ignorant countrymen.

According to the intelligent historian of the Lady Hilda's own town,* it would appear that the preachers sent forth were men well qualified by zeal and devotedness for their work; and that if in scholarship they could scarcely take the same high station as their successors, in the more important qualifications for their office, they occupied no second place.

Of the extent of the learning possessed by the abbess of Whitby and her associates we have, unfortunately, no means of ascertaining; no remains, not even a letter, having

* *Vide* Rev. G. Young's "History of Whitby."



been preserved to us. That she ranked high among her contemporaries in general learning, and especially in ecclesiastical knowledge, seems proved by the great council in 664, for determining the time of keeping Easter* being held at Whitby abbey, and under her auspices—probably at her request.

To this council a large number of the clergy from Scotland, from the southern parts of England, and from the Continent, are said to have come; the advocates of the British system having Bishop Colman, an excellent prelate and old friend of the Lady Hilda, for their leader, while those who ranged themselves on the side of the Latin church chose for theirs the haughty and ambitious Wilfred, subsequently Archbishop of York.

* The reader may, perhaps, be inclined to smile at the comparative unimportance of the dispute. Dr. Lingard, however, truly remarks, that even as a question of mere form it was not so trifling, since the circumstance of some congregations being engaged in the fasts and penitential services of Passion-week, while the others were celebrating the festival of Paschal-tide, could not but appear strange to their pagan neighbours. On another ground the dispute was yet more important, since it involved the weighty question, whether the Latin church should authoritatively legislate for the English churches?

The contest was long and bitter; the Latin party eventually prevailed, and the Lady Hilda had the mortification of bidding farewell to her friend Bishop Colman, who indignantly retired to Scotland.*

Although she had adhered to the defeated party, the abbess of Whitby stood so high in general estimation, that even Wilfred of York treated her with the highest respect, and she continued to rule her abbey, and to watch over her scholars as independently as of old. Nor, while so laudably anxious to promote the diffusion of learning, did the Lady Hilda, like too many in later times, scorn the rude, and as yet unformed language of her people.

“There was in this house,” says Bede, “a brother,” and he occupied no higher station than that of neatherd, “who, when he heard verses out of Scripture, would, with much sweetness and humility, turn them into English poetry.” This remark is worthy of notice, for it proves that even in the convent, where all the books were Latin, and where Latin was the only language directed to be used, a portion of the service—the Scriptural lessons at least, were

* *Vide* Bede.

read in the vernacular tongue; else, how could the unlettered neatherd have versified them? This man, on one occasion dreamed, or fancied he dreamed, that a stranger came to him, and bade him compose a song. He answered, "I cannot;" the command was repeated, and a subject given him—a subject sufficiently lofty for the unlettered *improvvisatore*, for it was "the creation of all things!" The dawn awakened the cowherd from his sleep, but the song which he had sung had not vanished with the night, and marvelling at the superiority of the verses he had so strangely composed, he proceeded to the steward of the household and related to him his wondrous dream.

By the steward he was conducted to the abbess Hilda, who, surrounded by her scholars and learned men, bade him repeat his verses. He began—they listened with attention and delight, and they gave him a passage of Scripture to versify. His waking poetical powers were found equal to his dreaming, and Hilda immediately transferred the hind from his rude dwelling to the convent school, and diligently superintended his education. She encouraged

his love of his native tongue, and urged him to continue to compose his poems in Saxon; and good cause had abbess Hilda to rejoice in the patronage so wisely bestowed, for it was Cædmon, the Saxon Milton, as he has been sometimes called, who owed the developement of his genius to her fostering care, and the earliest specimens of Saxon literature were composed in the abbey of Whitby.

And in the wise and gentle superintendence of her monasteries—for Hilda, toward the close of her life, built others in the vicinity of Whitby,—“did this handmaiden of Christ,” says Bede, “whom all who knew called mother, pass many years, giving not only an example of excellence to all around, but causing great good to be done by her means. And when she had thus presided many years, it pleased the Gracious Disposer of our health, to try her soul by a tedious infirmity, that after the example of the apostle, her strength might be made perfect in weakness. For being in her sixtieth year seized with fever, she began to be oppressed with a violent heat, and she laboured under this illness for six whole years. But during all this time, she never ceased to praise her Maker, nor to instruct, both in

public and private, the flock committed to her charge; and taught by her own experience, she admonished them all to serve the Lord with diligence in the time of health, and to bless Him with sincere resignation in the time of adversity and affliction." At length, in her sixty-seventh year, the Lady Hilda drew nigh unto death, and then, says her venerable biographer, "about cock-crowing feeling her end approaching, and having received the communion, she called together her flock and admonished them to preserve evangelical peace among themselves and with all around; and while she was yet speaking she passed from death unto life." *

That a rude and imaginative age should have believed that miracles followed the decease of the Lady Hilda, and that her fostering care still continued to watch over the institutions she had founded, is not surprising; and thus, for many centuries, the well from which she last drank was believed to possess healing virtues, and the ammonites on the beach were shewn as serpents, who at the prayer of the holy abbess were beheaded and turned into stone, and the sea-fowl, it was said, bowed the wing and paused


* *Vide* Bede.

in their flight to do homage to the abbey of Whitby; and centuries after her shrine was destroyed—almost, indeed, to the present day, popular tradition told, that when the summer's sun cast its rays across the ruined chancel of the abbey church, the glorified spirit of the sainted Hilda might be seen in the reflected sunshine.

With great sorrow and lamentation was the Lady Hilda buried in the abbey church; and then the rule of the abbey and its dependencies devolved upon her adopted daughter Elfleda, the daughter of King Oswy. Elfleda was only twenty-six years of age, but she had been well qualified for her high duties by her instructress; and her mother too, who, on the death of her husband had sought a retreat from the feuds and contests of a disputed succession in the abbey of Whitby, aided the young abbess with her counsels. And a worthy successor to Hilda did Elfleda eventually prove. Bede, who knew her well, celebrates with great delight the excellences of "that revered handmaiden of Christ, who, amid the joys of virginity exercised a maternal care over not a few congregations of convent maidens, and added to the

honours of her royal birth the superior honour of true piety."

Under her rule the abbey still sent forth many scholars and missionaries, and when Bishop Trumwine with his convent fled from Abercorn, the Lady Elfleda gave him and his companions an asylum with her, where he continued until his death. By the celebrated and excellent St. Cuthbert she was highly esteemed; he frequently visited her, and from an account of one of these visits in Bede, it appears that the lady abbess entertained her guests at her own table, just as in later times the lady of the castle might do. From other accounts, we find that the lady abbess of the early times was accustomed to go abroad and to visit her relations, wholly free from the restraints of later conventual rules; for Elfleda is represented as visiting her brothers who always sought her advice, and as watching beside the death-bed of King Aldfrid, her younger brother; and as labouring earnestly among the nobles after his death to promote reconciliation between Archbishop Wilfrid and the opposing party. Heddius, in his life of that turbulent prelate, refers to the wise counsels of the abbess



Elfleda, who was always the comforter and the best adviser of the whole province; and the high estimation in which she was held by the first men of that day, he illustrates by a quotation from a letter of the learned Theodore, archbishop of Canterbury, addressed to her, in which he designates the abbess Elfleda as "the wisest lady." During the minority of her nephew Osred, the kingdom owed much to her wise counsels and earnest endeavours to promote peace; her life, however, was not lengthened out to the age of her predecessor, for she died in 713 at the age of fifty-nine. *

* In the collection of the letters of St. Boniface there is one (the 51st) addressed to an abbess bearing the evidently foreign name of Adolana, by a writer who designates herself as "Elfled, handmaiden of the ecclesiastical household," in which she recommends to her care an abbess who had been her pupil, and who from her earliest years had been desirous of visiting Rome, requesting her to give the necessary information how her young friend should proceed on her journey. This Elfled was, doubtless, the successor of Hilda, and her letter was probably consigned to the care of Boniface on one of his journeys to Rome. We may well regret that the answer of the abbess Adolana has not been preserved, since it would most probably have afforded some curious information as to the mode in which the female pilgrims, at this early period, performed their journey to Rome.

The name of Elfreda's successor is unknown, and from this period to that of the fatal Danish invasion in 867, the records of the abbey of Whitby are an absolute blank. It continued, however, until that time, and then the nuns were dispersed, the abbey was destroyed, and when after more than two hundred years it was again rebuilt, it became a monastery for monks only.

The beneficial effects produced by the Lady Hilda's superintendence, was most probably the cause of so many women of royal birth founding abbeys on her plan during her lifetime, or before the close of the seventh century. Indeed, when we contemplate the incessant wars waged with such murderous fury by the rival monarchs of these little states which were called kingdoms, and the frequent changes of dynasty, which so often flung the delicately nurtured princess from her high station on the mercy of a barbarous age, we shall cease to wonder that so many an unprotected queen, or orphan princess, joyfully exchanged the fierce contentions and barbarous usages of a Saxon court, for the calm retreat and elevated duties of a Saxon convent. Thus Hereswyde,

the elder sister of St. Hilda fled from East Anglia, after the death of her husband, and the overthrow of his kingdom, to the cloister. And thus her four daughters, Sexburga, Ethelburga, Etheldreda, and Withburga, all took the veil.* Sexburga founded the noble abbey of Sheppy; Ethelburga went over to Germany to aid Boniface in his exertions to convert the Saxon idolaters, while Etheldreda founded the abbey of Ely, and to the present day is the name saint of Ely cathedral. The history of recluses like Queen Etheldreda presents a widely different picture from that of a Hilda or Elfleda. The saint who preferred unwashed to clean garments, and whose chief merit consisted in choosing protracted fasts and ceaseless mortifications, instead of a life of active benevolence, may be well passed over, especially, if we turn from the convent of Ely to the celebrated abbey of Barking.

This monastery was founded by Erconwald, that "good bishop" of London, to whom the citizens paid such eager homage in after times, and whose jewelled shrine to the period of the reformation, was the most gorgeous ornament

* *Anglia Sacra*, vol. i. *Hist. Eliensis*.

of Old St. Paul's. According to Bede, previously to his becoming bishop, Erconwald founded two monasteries, one for men at Chertsey, and one for women at Barking; placing as abbess over the last his sister Ethelburga. Little has been handed down to us respecting Ethelburga, save a high eulogy on her virtues by Bede, and a minute account of the many miracles that followed her decease; but the abbess who succeeded her, and who is said to have originally instructed her in the conventual rule, Hildelitha, claims especial notice, for to her and to her sisterhood, the first Latin scholar of his age, Aldhelm, bishop of Sherburn, addressed his two chief compositions.

The works here referred to, the first in prose and the second in poetry, are both on the same subject and are both entitled, "On the Praise of Virginity,"—" *De Laudibus Virginitatis*." The prose work opens with a short dedication "to the most honoured virgins of Christ, to Hildelitha the abbess, together with Justina and Cuthburga,* also Osburgh,

* The Cuthburga mentioned above was, doubtless, the sister of Ina the powerful king of Wessex, who, we are told, entered the abbey of Barking to learn the monastic



Altgida, and Scholastica, Hidburga, and Berngida, Eulalia, and Tecla, adorning together the Church by the fame of their sanctity," and to whom therefore, he, "Aldhelm, an unfruitful servant of Christ, wishes everlasting happiness."

The work itself although very diffuse, and characterised by an excess of turgid ornament, was probably read and studied with great delight by the holy sisterhood of Barking, to whom a new work of any kind must have been

rule, previously to her founding the abbey of Wimbourne in Dorsetshire, where she became the first abbess. It was from this convent and during Cuthburga's rule, that the two sisters, Agatha and Lioba, went forth to pagan Germany, and under the auspices of their countryman St. Boniface, became successively abbesses of the monastery of Scoversheim, near Mentz, and the means of diffusing Christianity and the blessings of civilised life among the female population.—*Vide* Monasticon. I have not been able to trace any other of the names to the various monasteries of that day. Tecla, however, appears in a letter addressed by St. Boniface to three nuns, and as it is by no means a common name for an English nun, the Tecla addressed by Aldhelm and the one addressed by St. Boniface were probably the same. Eulalia and Scholastica, as well as Tecla, were names of female saints; it is therefore, not unlikely that the nuns who bore them had been converted from paganism and baptised at a mature age; in which case it was common for them to choose a saint's name.

a prize, and who, doubtless, duly appreciated the honour of receiving one from so illustrious a scholar as the aged bishop of Sherburn.

But although diffuse and paraphrastic it abounds with anecdotes and examples, taken from the Old Testament, and from ancient history, and from the writings of the fathers; and it concludes with a copious female martyrology, in which the well-known names of St. Margaret and St. Cecilia are found, together with those less known to fame of St. Eulalia, St. Justina, and St. Thecla. In conclusion, he laments the inadequacy of his powers, and bids farewell to his "sisters, flowers of the Church, nurselings of the convent, choice pearls of Christ, gems of Paradise, and participants of the heavenly inheritance."*

The Latin poem on the same subject consists of above two thousand four hundred hexameters, and commences with a curiously constructed acrostic, of which the first and last lines, and the initial and final letters of each line consist of the same words.† In the poem

* Mag. Bibl. Vet. Patrum, vol. xiii. p. 70.

† This acrostic is addressed to Hildelitha, but as she is entitled "abbatissa Maxima," several writers have con-



itself, there are, however, no traces of that laborious trifling which disfigures the opening address, but it presents many brilliant and even eloquent passages, although as a whole it is

sidered it to have been addressed to an abbess of that name; the title, however, probably refers to her being abbess of Barking, which down to the period of the spoliation of the monasteries, claimed precedence of every other female convent, and was named the chief abbey. In Mr. Turner's interesting "History of the Anglo-Saxons," several specimens of this poem are given. The opening lines are subjoined in Mr. Turner's version, with slight alteration, for it is scarcely possible to give a better:—

"Almighty Father! Sovereign of the world,
Whose word the lucid summit of the sky
With stars adorned; who earth's foundations framed,
Who tinged with purple flowers the barren heath,
And curbed the wandering billows of the main,
Lest o'er the land the foaming waves should rage.
Thou cheer'st the cultured field with cooling streams,
With dropping clouds the ripening corn distends,
Thine orbs of light dispel the dreary shades,
Titan the day, and Cynthia tends the night;
By Thee, what tribes in fields of ocean roam,
What scaly hosts in the blue whirlpools play!
What winged crowds play in the limpid air,
Whose voiceful throats their joyful carols pour,
And hail with diverse sounds Thee, Maker, Lord.
O grant Thine aid Thou Merciful, that I
May sing the actions of Thy pristine saints!"

rather heavy. The praises of forty-five male and female saints occupy the greater part, and their deeds are related with much minuteness. Altogether as a specimen of the Latin poetry of this dark period, this, the chief poem of St. Aldhelm, claims our notice; and yet, more so as a specimen of the instruction addressed to the female recluse, since, to quote Dr. Dunham, "it is a poem far from lucid, and requiring for its comprehension a respectable knowledge of the language."

But the Saxon nuns of the eighth century were not only capable of reading Latin, they wrote it, and many specimens of their epistles will be found in the collection of the works of the fathers of this and the following century.


In the collection of the letters of St. Boniface,* many addressed by him to English nuns, and many addressed by them to him, meet us. Among his most favourite correspondents is the abbess Eadburga, a woman of royal parentage, and who is reported to have held the crosier of St. Mildred's minster in the Isle of Thanet, from the year 691 to 751. Over

* Mag. Bibl. Vet. Patrum, tom. xiii. p. 80.

Boniface, the apostle of Germany,* the abbess Eadburga seems to have watched like a mother, and one of his earliest letters, in which he signs himself but “an humble deacon,” is addressed to her. In it, he offers for her acceptance some cinnamon and frankincense, and a *silver pen*. And most appropriate was this last gift, for the abbess Eadburga not only patronised letters and learned men, but was a most diligent student herself, as we learn from the letter of one of the nuns under her care,—one of the most interesting letters in the very interesting collection of the letters of St. Boniface.

This letter is written by a nun named Leobgitha, and in commencing it, she supplicates the prayers of Boniface for her father Tinne, who lived in the western parts, and died eight

* This excellent man was a native of Wessex, his name was Winfrid, he assumed the cowl early in life, and in his thirty-sixth year obtained permission to go and preach to the German idolaters. His mission was successful, and he returned to England to fetch male and female teachers to assist him in his work. His name was changed by the pope on his appointment as archbishop of Mentz, where he continued until 755, when he was killed by the idolaters he sought to convert.



years ago. "My mother named Ebbe is related to you, she yet lives, and desires your prayers. I am the only daughter of both my parents, and may unworthy I be allowed to take thee in place of a brother, since in no one of the human race can I place such confidence as in thee." She acquaints him that she sends him a gift, but unfortunately does not specify what it was; probably some altar cloth or cope of fine needlework, and she thus concludes: "Beneath are some verses which I have striven to compose according to the rules of poetic tradition, not with confident boldness offering them, but desiring to excite your superior mind, and asking your aid. This art I learned from the instruction of Eadburga, who ceaselessly versifies the sacred law." Four Latin hexameters follow, of which the following are a close translation:—

"O! may the Almighty, all-creating King—
Who in His Father's kingdom shines in light
Ineffable, to thee, aye safety bring,
And grant thee endless joys in glory bright."

The letter concludes with the pleasing and very usual valediction in the letters of this period: "Farewell, and may you, living a longer

span, supplicate a more blessed life for me.”*

We do not possess the answer of Boniface to Leobgitha’s letter, but that he entered into correspondence with her we find from her name being mentioned in subsequent letters, and from one being addressed to her, and Tecla and Cynhilda, which gives an interesting account of his labours and dangers in Pagan Germany, and which entreats their prayers, “that if the wolf should come I may not fly like the hireling, but, after the example of the Good Shepherd, defend the lambs and their mothers, and faithfully and truly endure to the end,”—a prayer that was granted, for, while preventing his Saxon converts from defending him with their weapons, Boniface fell pierced through by the spears of the idolaters, to whom he was about to preach the Gospel.

There are many letters addressed by him to the abbess Eadburga, among others a long and very curious one, detailing the vision of a monk who visited the infernal regions, and was made acquainted with the approaching condemnation of Ceobred, king of Mercia.

* Mag. Bibl. Vet. Patrum, tom. xiii. p. 83.

In this he addresses her as "the most honourable maiden, and most beloved lady Eadburga, distinguished for the wisdom of her monastic government."* Two incidents in this letter afford glimpses of the state of female society among the lower orders.

The one is, that the monk and his brother owned a female slave, and on his death-bed he exhorted his brother to restore her to freedom, —this the brother neglected to do, and he describes his distress at it. Another proof among many, how earnestly the teachers of Christianity inculcated the manumission of the slave, if not fulfilled during life, as a dying duty. The other incident strongly resembles those homely but often forcible stories, told by the middle-age preachers, and to which in our progress we shall have often occasion to refer.

* A translation of the whole of this curious epistle may be seen in the third volume of Dr. Dunham's "Middle Ages." Ceobred was probably obnoxious to the abbess Eadburga, inasmuch as he was the opponent of her relative Ina, king of the West Saxons, with whom he had just before fought a most sanguinary battle. The reader must bear in mind that Boniface merely details what had been told him, and what, it seems, he firmly believed; the charge of duplicity, therefore, must rest with the monk who related it, not with the mere detailer.

On his return to earth, the monk saw a maiden grinding at a mill, and the fiends, though unseen by her, stood around tempting her to sin. At length she cast her eyes on "an ornamented distaff" which lay near, and tempted by its exceeding beauty she stole it. At this the fiends were filled with great joy, and they exultingly cried, "Now is she ours, for she is a sinner and a thief."

In the same interesting collection are several letters from other female recluses, addressed to St. Boniface, and among them a long epistle from the abbess Eangyth, and her daughter, Heabrog, or Bugga, which possesses passages of great eloquence. There are many from Boniface addressed to them; and a letter to an unnamed correspondent, whom he addresses in a strain of fatherly affection, and exhorts, in pleasing verse, to keep "the sacred vow which we took together ever in mind," and "to watch over the female lambs of Him, who sitteth in the highest heavens, for his love alone."

It is indeed a singular, but refreshing contrast, to turn from the narratives of the endless wars waged by the monarchs of the Saxon kingdoms, to the letters of St. Boniface. We seem

to have advanced some centuries, not only in learning, but in civilisation; and we almost cease to wonder that long after those times, when monastic institutions were needed, the love and respect for them continued, and that, almost to the present day, the contemplative scholar should look back, with lingering fondness, to those ages, when the convent was the sole temple in which the light of knowledge was enshrined.

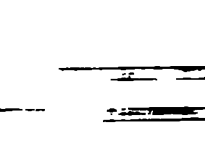
But, such was the estimation in which women were held, and so great was the care bestowed on their education, even at this dark period, that not only do we meet with letters and Latin poetry, written by convent maidens, but we find that they took their share in literary composition. Some very creditable compositions of the continental nuns are yet extant; and, but for the wide and utter destruction of literary remains which followed the incursions of the Danes, Whitby, and Minster, and Barking, might have afforded to modern times many similar specimens. We have one, however, remaining, the work of an English nun, which, although it cannot claim a high literary merit, is interesting as an unaffected narrative of the

lives of two worthy men ; and especially as giving a minute and often *naïve* description of the travels of two Saxon pilgrims, through Asia Minor to the Holy Land, at the beginning of the eighth century.

This work is entitled “ The Lives of St. Willibald and St. Wunebald ; ”* and the writer, in her opening address, supplicates the indulgence of the holy fathers, at whose request she has undertaken to write the lives of these her relations, describing herself as “ an unworthy female of Saxon race, but newly come hither.” From a remark toward the end, we find that she was a resident in the monastery of Heidenheim, one of the convents founded by St. Boniface ; and therefore was most probably one of the Englishwomen who went over to assist in his mission, but her name cannot be discovered.

The life of St. Wunebald is very short, and contains little save the usual allowance of the common miracles performed at the tombs of all, whose friends claimed for them the honours of saintship : but the life of his brother, St. Willibald, is very interesting for the minute detail of his travels, of which she says, “ I have

* Canisii Thesaurus Monumentorum, vol. ii. p. 105

[illegible]

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1. The first step is to identify the problem or question that needs to be answered. This involves understanding the context and the specific requirements of the task.

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and it sometimes happens that flames come forth from it, and then the inhabitants of the city take the veil of St. Agatha and place it on the fire, and it ceases."

From Sicily, after touching at various islands, they reached Mitylene; and there the pilgrims saw "two recluses, sitting on pillars, close by the sea-side; and these pillars are built like a thick wall, with stones, and very high, that the water may not reach them." From Mitylene they proceeded to Cyprus, and at length arrived "in the region of the Saracens, at a city called Emessa."

On their arrival here, there were six pilgrims besides St. Willibald and his brother, and the writer *naïvely* tells us how the Saracens, finding them to be poor men, and not comprehending from whence they came, seized them, and led them before a rich old man that he might question them. He asked them from whence they came; and when they told him, "I believe it," said he, "for truly I have seen many countrymen of yours in these parts, not seeking evil, but seeking to fulfil the law of their God." His opinion was not believed, and they were all led to prison. Here they remained some time,



and every Saturday were led out to the bath, and then taken back again ; numbers of the inhabitants crowding round them and gazing at their dress, and still more at the fair complexion and blue eyes of the pilgrims from the far north.

At length a Spaniard saw them, and he made their case known to the king. They were brought before him, and again asked from whence they came. They said, " From yonder, where the sun goes down." At this the bystanders were very wroth, " for," said they, " there is no land in the west, there is nought but water." The king, however, whether his geographical knowledge was more extensive, or whether he pitied the poor strangers, now effectually interfered. " These men have done no evil against *us*," he said, " then wherefore should we punish them ? Set them free, and let them pursue their journey." So the joyful pilgrims set forth, and soon reached the fair city of Damascus.

The reader may, perhaps, be amused with the fair writer's minute account of St. Willibald's wandering in the Holy land, and with her simple picture of the wonders that met the eyes

of the marvelling pilgrim, who, eleven centuries ago, visited the land of Palestine. The following portion of the narrative shall therefore be given in her own words.

Having duly visited Galilee and Nazareth, they entered the town of Cana; and "there is a great church, and in that church one of the water-pots which our Lord commanded to be filled with water, and from it, gave forth wine. And then they went on to Mount Tabor, where the Lord was transfigured. There is now a monastery, and a church consecrated to our Lord, and Moses, and Elias; and the inhabitants call that place 'Agemons.' Having prayed there, they went on to the city of Tiberias, which stands on the sea-shore, where our Lord walked with dry feet on the waves, and Peter, walking, sunk. There are many churches, and synagogues of the Jews there. Then they came to Capernaum, where the Lord raised the ruler's daughter. There was a house, and a great wall, and the people said that Zebedee and his two sons had dwelt there.

"And from thence they went on to Bethsaida, where Peter and Andrew dwelt, and

there is now a church, where their house formerly was. And early on the morrow they went to Chorazin, where our Lord cured the possessed man. There is a church there, and there they prayed ; and setting forth from thence they came to a place where two fountains spring from the earth, Jor and Dan ; and then flowing from behind a mountain, they join in one stream, and form Jordan.


“ And there they remained one night, between the two fountains ; and the shepherds gave them sour milk to drink ; and there they saw wonderful herds of cattle, with long backs, short legs, great horns, and they were all of one colour. In summer there are deep marshes round about ; and when the greatest heat comes on, these herds go to the marshes and submerge themselves—the whole body except the head.

“ And from thence they set forth to Cæsarea, where there is a church, and many Christians. Again they went onward and came to the monastery of St. John the Baptist ; and there were twenty monks. They remained there one night, and then went forward one mile toward Jordan, to the place where the

Lord was baptised, and where they now baptise. There is now a church raised over the place on stone pillars, and under the church is dry ground. A cross of wood stands in the midst, and there is a small stream of water that runs there, and a rope is stretched across Jordan, fastened firmly on either side. Then at the feast of Epiphany the sick and infirm coming thither, hold by this rope, and are thus bathed in the water. Our bishop, Willibald, bathed himself here in Jordan.

“ And they went hence to Galgala. This place is within five miles, and there are in the church twelve stones. This church is wood, and not large, and there are the twelve stones which the children of Israel took from Jordan and carried to Galgala as a testimony of their having passed over; and there having prayed, they went on to Jericho.

“ And then they came to Jerusalem, by that place where the holy cross of our Lord was found. There is now a church in this place, called the place of Calvary, but St. Helen, when she discovered it, enclosed it within the boundaries of Jerusalem. And there stand three wooden crosses in front of the east court



of the church near the wall. These are not within the church, but withoutside, under a covering ; and there is that garden near, where the sepulchre of our Lord was. This sepulchre was cut in the rock, and that rock stands upon the ground : it is four-square within, and narrow toward the top ; and the cross of that sepulchre stands now upon the top, and there beside is built an admirable house, and on the east side, in that rock, is the door of the sepulchre, by which men enter into it to pray ; and there is the bed where the body of the Lord lay ; and there stand about the bed fifteen golden basins of oil burning day and night. That bed is on the northern side, within the sepulchre, and is on the right hand of the man as he goes in to pray there. And there, before the door of the sepulchre, lieth a great stone, like to that which the angel rolled away.

“ And our bishop came hither at the festival of St. Martin, and immediately he came there he fell sick, and remained infirm until the week of the Nativity ; but when recovered he proceeded to the church called Holy Zion, in the midst of Jerusalem. There he prayed, and then went to Solomon's porch, where is the

fish-pond where the sick lay waiting until the angel should trouble the waters. And in like manner he told us how a great pillar stands before the gate of the city, and on the top a cross, as a sign and memorial that there the Jews tried to take away the body of St. Mary. For when the twelve apostles bearing the corpse came to the gate, the Jews sought to take it. Immediately, those who had stretched forth their hands towards the bier found them set fast, as though glued to it, nor were able to move them, until, by the prayers of the Apostles, they were released; and then the body was carried to the sepulchre appointed, and from thence the angels bore it to Paradise.*

“ And then the bishop descended into the valley of Jehosaphat, and there is a church of St. Mary, and in it the sepulchre where her body was laid. And he prayed there, and then ascended the Mount of Olives, which is near the valley on the east. And in that mount is a church where our Lord prayed. And then he came to the church on that mount, from which our Lord ascended into heaven. And in the midst of the church

* This was the common legend of those times.

stands a plate of brass, beautifully wrought, and it is square. This is in the midst of the church on the place where our Lord ascended into heaven. And in the middle court is a quadrangle, and there are little glass lamps; and round about these lamps is glass to enclose them. And this is why they are enclosed, that they may keep alight both in rain and sunshine.* This church is, moreover, very broad, and without a roof, and there stand two pillars just withinside the church against the northern and the southern walls. These are in remembrance of the two men who said, 'Ye men of Galilee; why stand ye gazing up into heaven?' And that man who can pass between the wall and the columns, they say he is free from his sins.

"Then he went to the place where the angels appeared to the shepherds, and then to

* The wondering admiration with which the writer describes these little glass lamps, is rather curious, for, as we have before observed, glass for windows was introduced by Benedict, the bishop, full fifty years before. We, however, find no notice of any glass *vessels* for a long period subsequent. It was probably, therefore, this new adaptation of glass that excited the admiration of St. Willibald and his biographer.

Bethlehem, where our Lord was born. This place was formerly a cave, and now it is a house, cut four-square in the rock ; and the earth is dug away round about, and a church is now built over it. And on the place where the Lord was born now stands an altar, and another smaller altar is there, and when they celebrate mass in the cave, they take that smaller altar, and carry it within. This church which stands above, is built in the form of a cross, and it is a glorious building."

And thus, from place to place, did St. Willibald and his brother journey, praying before each shrine, and keeping vigil beside each holy place ; little heeding weariness or dangers, although on one occasion, in sore jeopardy from a lion, who greatly affrighted him by his roaring ; and, at another time, falling among thieves, who bound and severely beat the poor pilgrim ; and, although he had no treasures of silver or gold, robbed him of his most valued possession—a calabash of precious ointment, called "*balsamum*," until at length they took ship at Tyre, and came to Constantinople.

Here St. Willibald abode two years, pay-

ing due honours to the shrines of the saints, and apparently receiving much kindness from his brethren of the Greek communion. At length he set out on his return to Italy, from whence, after some stay, he set forth for Savoy and Pagan Germany, as a coadjutor of St. Boniface. Here, according to the simple narrative of the writer, he remained many years, and became bishop of Eistadt, "a place all devastated, having no house, save the church of St. Mary, which yet stands there, though much smaller than those he built." He subsequently visited Thuringia, where, in a good old age, he departed.

"And now, what can I say of St. Willibald, my master and your nursing father?" is her conclusion, "what was more pre-eminent than his piety, what more excellent than his humility, what more disinterested than his patience, more rigid than his self-denial, more illustrious than his mildness? To whom was he second in solacing the afflicted, in feeding the destitute, in clothing the naked? Nor do I say these things at hazard, but I have seen and heard them. Let praise then be given to God



—not to man, for ‘let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord.’ ”*

We have lingered, perhaps, too long over the simple narrative of the nameless recluse of Heidenheim, but the earliest literary composition of an Englishwoman seems to demand a specific notice. And it is melancholy to reflect, that soon after the period when that narrative was written (between the years 780 and 790), those noble English convents, which we have contemplated in the foregoing pages, and in one of which she doubtless received her education, were doomed, without exception, to destruction.

In the year 787, England was first visited by the fearful scourge of a Danish invasion. The fierce pirates of the northern seas, who boasted that they never slept beneath a roof, or quaffed their mead beside a hearth-stone, lured by the wealth and unprotectedness of the north-eastern coast, landed, and “with their never-failing attendants,” as Brompton, almost poetically says, “Mars and Vulcan, fire and sword,” laid waste the most fertile parts of England.

* Canisii Thesaurus Monumentorum, vol. ii. p. 117.


The spoil, which they carried away, excited the adventurous spirit of their brother pirates. Horde after horde descended on our shores during the following century, first under the conduct of that most daring of Vikings, Regner Lodbrok ; and subsequently under that of the ferocious brothers, Hubba and Inguen.

In the death-song of Regner, he exults in the fierce retribution that should follow his death, and bequeaths to his wife Aslauga the well-pleasing task of urging by her war-song her sons, and their followers, to avenge the death of their father and leader. And fatal to Saxon civilisation and learning, was the descent of these fierce barbarians ; and it is mournful to reflect that, to the war-songs of Aslauga, the studious and unoffending sisterhoods of so many a noble institution owed their dispersion, and, in many instances, their death.

In 867, the abbey of Whitby, which, during the previous incursions of the Danes, had been saved from injury, almost by miracle, was plundered and burnt ; the nuns were dispersed, and when, after almost 200 years, the dwelling-place of St. Hilda was rebuilt, it became no longer a place of refuge for women, but an

establishment for monks. The same fierce plunderers pressed onward, and the same year witnessed the overthrow of the abbey of Ely, and the destruction of the Church and shrine of St. Etheldreda. Meanwhile the wealthy monasteries of Kent excited the avarice of the invaders, and the noble convent of Sheppey, founded by Queen Sexburga, for a hundred nuns, was plundered and destroyed. A more melancholy fate awaited the nuns of Minster,—that illustrious abbey, where Eadburga held rule for sixty years ; it was plundered, set on fire, and all the inmates perished in the flames.

The victorious Danes now sailed up the Thames, attacked London, took it, and from thence carried fire and sword into the surrounding country. The wealthy abbey of Barking then shared the fate that had befallen its sister institutions, and lay in ruins more than a hundred years. Unlike the other convents, it was refounded by King Edgar, for nuns ; and retaining its original station, claimed precedence of every female monastic institution throughout the land, and its abbess, in after times, took her place as first of the four abbesses, who were baronesses in their own right.



A period of great darkness and barbarism now succeeds, rendered darker by the contrast of earlier times, for, with the burning of the convent libraries and the dispersion of the nuns, all efforts to promote female education ceased; while the enlightened efforts of Charlemagne, in the preceding century, to establish schools in his dominions, and his munificent offers to Saxon scholars, had, even ere the Danish invasions, well-nigh deprived England of her most learned clergy. "With Alcuin,*

* In the collection of Alcuin's additional letters, there is one addressed to a female correspondent, whose name we are unable to ascertain. In it he alludes to the progress she has made in literature, and he exhorts her to go on. She was probably the superior of a monastery, for, he says, "Truly, your progress in the Lord is the great delight of my soul; therefore, as thou hast begun, so go on; and aided by God's grace, mayst thou study most diligently. Each one's reward shall be proportioned to his labour; and he who labours most shall receive the largest wages. Now is the time for exertion, the time for reward is to come. I know the wisdom of your mind, and a few words suffice for the wise. You will understand better than I can write, and fulfil in works what I can but faintly explain by words." — *Canisii Thesaur.* vol. ii. p. 439.

This letter shews, that up to the period of the disastrous Danish invasions, the English nuns still retained their high literary character.

the glory of Saxon literature ceased," and the destruction of the noble and priceless library at York, founded at such cost by Archbishop Egbert, and watched over with such anxious care by Alcuin, until his removal to France completed the ruin of Saxon scholarship; the efforts, even of an Alfred, were unavailing, and the very name, Saxon, ere long became a byword for the unlettered churl.

In tracing the history of the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, we meet with few illustrious women, except within the convent. Ethelburga, the wife of Ina, king of the West Saxons, however, deserves notice as a wise and active coadjutrix of her husband, both in war and peace; and, when in old age, he, at her suggestion, resigned his crown, to pass the remainder of his life in prayer, she accompanied him on his pilgrimage to Rome, where, in performing offices of kindness to those of her countrymen who came thither on pilgrimage, she spent her last days.*

A different character to Ethelburga was Eadburga, daughter of the celebrated Offa, king of Mercia, and distinguished, like him,

* Saxon Chronicle.



for superior talents, but also for unscrupulous wickedness. She became the wife of Brithric, king of the East Saxons, and having become violently attached to a young man in her husband's court, who rejected her advances, she prepared poison for him. The cup which was intended for another was drank by the king, his death followed, and the indignant East Saxons drove Eadburga from the kingdom.

Impenitent and unabashed, the queen of the West Saxons having collected her treasures, passed over to France, and sought an interview with Charlemagne, the monarch, who had formed so close an alliance with her father.

“Choose, Eadburga,” said he; “which will you take, my son or myself?”

“Your son, for he is youngest,” was the reply. Charlemagne, indignant, or probably only pretending so, to gain possession of her treasures, assured her that, if she had chosen him, he should have protected her; he deprived her of her wealth, and sent her to a convent.

The discipline of a religious house suited not Eadburga, she made her escape; and after many vicissitudes and wanderings, she traversed, as a common beggar, the streets of



Pavia, where led, by a little girl, she became, in her old age, an object of mingled disgust and pity to the Saxon pilgrims on their journey to Rome.*

The indignation with which the Saxons viewed the crimes of the daughter of Offa, and the singular, though unjust retribution, which the *witena-gemot* determined to inflict, proved the startled horror which the whole people felt, and affords evidence of the rare occurrence of similar criminality. Indeed, if the annals of the eighth and ninth centuries present few memoirs of women illustrious for their virtues, they also, with the single exception of Ead-burga, present no records of female guilt.

Meanwhile, the kingdom of the West Saxons, from the death of the powerful Offa, king of Mercia, who kept that rising monarchy in check, gradually advanced in power and opulence; and, less exposed to the incursions of the Danes than the northern kingdoms,


* Asser, who tells the story almost in the very words above, declares that he had often seen her in the streets of Pavia,—a proof that she must have lived, notwithstanding her poverty, to a very advanced age.



enjoyed a degree of security possessed by no other. The accession of Egbert, in 824, to the throne of Wessex, and his subsequent conquest of Mercia, with which the kingdom of the East Saxons had been incorporated, probably gave rise to the popular opinion, that he was the first king of the united Angles. The express words of the Saxon Chronicle, that venerable and most important history, however, disprove this; for it is there stated, "King Ecgbright conquered the Mercian kingdom, and all that is *south of the Humber*. And he was the eighth king, who was the Bretwalda."* Thus, the title which this venerable chronicle gives him, is but the same which had already been borne by seven preceding monarchs of the divided kingdom.

In 836, Egbert died, and was succeeded by his son Ethelwulf, who, on the death of his elder brothers, had been taken from the cloister. But the father of Alfred was ill suited by education, as probably by natural character, to wield the sceptre at such a crisis. Mercia

* Saxon Chronicle, Gibson, under year 827.



regained its independence, although only to sustain the misfortunes of a Danish invasion in 839, and another in 851, when London, its capital, was stormed, and the king of the Mercians put to flight. The first wife of Ethelwulf was the daughter of Orlac, his cup-bearer. She died in 850, leaving four sons, the youngest of whom, the celebrated Alfred, was scarcely six years old.

It was in the following year that Ethelwulf, although advanced in years, determined to set out with his youngest son on pilgrimage to Rome. On his return, he visited the court of Charles the Bald, King of France, and, struck with the beauty of his young daughter, Judith, the aged king of the West Saxons asked her in marriage. The king of France assented, and the fair Judith was sent to England, where she was married, and, notwithstanding the expressed dissatisfaction of Ethelwulf's subjects, solemnly crowned.*

* The form of the coronation service has been preserved in Du Chesne, and it is worthy of notice, as supplying the only record of the forms or the phraseology used at the inauguration of a queen consort.

The earlier part of this form is merely the conclusion

Unlike the other Saxon queens, the Frankish princess, with crown and sceptre, took her seat on the throne beside him; but Ethelwulf, we learn, gave so much offence to his people by this departure from the general rule, that no Saxon king, for a long period

of the marriage ceremony; and after the ring has been given, with the exhortation, "Take this ring, the sign of fidelity and love, and the bond of marriage union, that no man may separate those whom God hath joined, who liveth and reigneth for ever," the queen is blessed in the following words:—

"We invoke thee, Holy Lord, Omnipotent Father, Eternal God, for this thine handmaiden, whom, in the divine dispensation of thy providence, thou hast caused to grow up from her youthful blossoming (*juvenali flore*) to this joyful time: give her richly of thy fear, that she may go on full of truth before thee and all men, from day to day, unto better things. May she receive, rejoicing with us, largely of thy heavenly grace, from the kingdom above; and thence, being guarded by the strength of thy mercy from all adversity, be deemed worthy to live for ever."

A rather long, but eloquent prayer, at the anointing, in which that she may possess "the simplicity and meekness of the dove," is supplicated, next follows, and then the coronation takes place in the following words:—

"May the Lord crown thee with glory and honour, and place upon thy head a crown of spiritual precious stones, that whatever may be typified by the brightness of gold, or the changeful splendour of gems, may ever

after, thought it prudent to follow his example.

On the death of Ethelwulf, in 857, his eldest son, Ethelbald, became king of Wessex, while the second son received as his portion

shine forth in thy life and conduct ; which may He grant, to whom be honour and glory, world without end."

Then follow the blessings :—


" Bless, O Lord, this thine handmaiden, thou who rulest the kingdoms of kings through all generations."

" Accept the offerings of her hands, and may she be replenished with the blessings of the fruits of the earth, of the heavens, of the dews, of the depths, from the heights of the ancient mountains, and from the eternal hills."

" May the blessing of Him who dwelt in the bush come upon her head. Grant to her showers from heaven, the fatness of the earth, abundance of corn and wine, that their people and their posterity may obey them, and this nation bring honour to her, and to her children."

A short prayer, which was probably said after the communion, concludes the service, which, independently of its devotional beauty, claims no slight interest in the circumstance of its having been composed well-nigh a thousand years ago.—*Vide* Du Chesne, *Hist. Fran.* tom. ii. p. 425.

On the death of Ethelwulf, Judith, whether of her own free will or by compulsion we know not, was married to Ethelbald, his eldest son. This marriage excited the anger of the new king's subjects, and Judith was dismissed. Ethelbald's death followed soon after, and Judith married her third husband Baldwin of Flanders.



Kent, Essex, Surrey, and Sussex. Both, within nine years, died, and were succeeded by their third brother, Ethelred, who, having reigned but five years, also died, and was succeeded in 871 by the celebrated King Alfred.

At the commencement of this reign, the miseries of the Danish invasions seem to have reached their height. The whole of the eastern coast, many of the midland counties, and a great portion even of his hereditary dominions of Wessex, were under their sway ; and Alfred was at length driven from his throne. The story how he rallied his scattered forces, and won back his dominions, has been often told ; and so great was his success, that in 886, to quote the words of his friend and biographer Asser, “to this king all the Angles and the Mercians, the Cantians and the east and west Saxons, who before were every where dispersed, or in captivity to the Pagans, returned and submitted to his rule.” Alfred had from henceforth leisure to promote the learning and civilisation of his subjects, and the beneficial influence he exerted we shall trace in the succeeding chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

The Revival of Learning under Alfred—Story of Queen Judith—Alfred's Conventual Foundations—Shaftesbury—Wilton—Nunaminster—Eadburga, its First Abbess—Ethelfleda, "the Lady of the Mercians"—Elfrida—Her Remorse—Emma married to Ethelred—Her Marriage with Canute—Bishop Alwine—Misfortunes of Emma on the Death of Canute—Accession of her Son Hardicanute—Story of her Daughter "Gunilda the Fair"—Accession of her Son Edward—His Quarrel with Her—Her Trial by Ordeal—Her Death—Editha—She becomes the Wife of King Edward—Dismissed by Him—Restored—Her Learning—Ingulphus' School-boy Interview with Her—Introduction of Norman Customs—Edward's Death—Respect paid to Editha by the Conqueror—Her Mother Githa—"Editha the Fair," Widow of Harold.

THE baleful effects of the Danish invasions, while they were felt by every class, were more especially observable in the increasing ignorance and barbarism of the people; and so widely extended had that ignorance become,

that ere the close of the ninth century the kingdom of Wessex could scarcely boast a single scholar able to translate a Latin book into his native tongue.

At this period Alfred ascended the throne, and it is to that illustrious monarch that we must turn, when contemplating the partial revival of literature among the Saxons, for he was not only their great military leader and legislator, but the scholar-king, who unceasingly taught, both by precept and example, the importance of literature as the basis of civilisation. And yet the learned Alfred, the founder of schools, the great patron of scholars, the translator of Boethius, the monarch who beguiled his almost ceaseless sufferings by literary pursuits, was distinguished in boyhood by a distaste for learning.

The pleasant story how the brilliant illuminations in the book of Saxon poetry first aroused the spirit of emulation in the eager boy, has been often told; but it must again be told in a work devoted to the history of woman in England, for it was a female influence that acted upon the susceptible mind of Alfred, and a second time was a taste for


learning awakened in the land by female agency.

Alfred had the misfortune, before his seventh year, to lose his mother, Osburga, "a most noble, wise, and religious woman," as Asser characterises her. It is probable that, had she lived, his education, at an early period, would have been more diligently superintended; but deprived of maternal care, and resident in a court where the pursuits of the nobles were rude and unintellectual, Alfred, notwithstanding his journey to Rome, the centre of European civilisation and literature, had attained the age of twelve years before he could read even his own language. Still, that this was not in consequence of inferior abilities, Asser, his contemporary and biographer, earnestly maintains; for in the athletic sports of the age Alfred was eminent, and although he disliked the labour of learning, he eagerly listened to the songs of the minstrels who frequented his father's court, and learned many of them by heart.

This love for the poetry of his native land seems to have awakened the interest of Judith, his young step-mother, and she determined

to arouse his latent energies; she therefore brought one day a book of Saxon poetry to him and his brothers (they, therefore, although considerably older, must have been as ignorant as he was), and shewing it to them, declared that he who should most quickly learn its contents should become its possessor.

“ This,” says Asser, “ was as a voice of divine inspiration; and allured by the beauty of the first letter of the book,” that capital on which the Saxon illuminators bestowed their most elaborate ornaments and their most vivid colours, Alfred asked, “ ‘ And will you truly give that book to one of us? even to him who shall most quickly read and recite it to you?’ The mother, rejoicing and smiling,” (and yet Judith was daughter of a foreign race, and only step-mother, but could his own Saxon mother have done more?) “replied, ‘ Truly I will give it.’ Then he, forthwith taking the book from her hand, went to the school-room and began to read it.” He soon after returned, brought the book, and reciting its contents, received it as the reward of his diligence. From henceforward Asser informs us that Alfred was as distinguished for his love of




learning as he had previously been for his dislike. Night and morning alike saw him devoted to his beloved books, and bearing one in his bosom even when attending the daily services of the church, "as," says Asser, "we have often seen."*

On his accession, his continued struggles against the Danes left him no leisure to cultivate the arts of peace; but when at length his repeated victories restored security to his kingdom, Alfred earnestly devoted himself to the revival of learning, lamenting those past times when, from the southern coast to the Tyne, each abbey possessed a library, and numbered within its walls an illustrious band of scholars. Thus the most intelligent monarch of his age distinguished himself as the greatest builder and patron of monasteries,—not surely from superstitious motives, for Alfred was, in religious knowledge, as his works prove, greatly in advance of his contemporaries, but because he knew that in those rude and unsettled times it was only in such guarded seclusion that the light of knowledge could be preserved.

* Asser, p. 17.

The story that he founded schools at Oxford has been considered by our best historians as apocryphal ; but that he encouraged the formation of abbey-schools, and bestowed large gifts on them, the annals of many of the chief Saxon monasteries shew. And might not gratitude to his affectionate step-mother, who first beguiled him into the paths of learning, have been the cause of that abundant liberality which Alfred displayed toward the female conventual institutions of the land ? not only by the princely gifts bestowed on those which had survived the ravages of the Danes, but by the foundation of three abbeys, which, together with Barking, for many ages stood first in wealth and privilege. These three were within the boundaries of his hereditary kingdom Wessex, and there is little doubt that they were established with a liberality to which later days can lay no claim as free schools for the instruction of his *female* subjects.

The first of these, in the order of foundation, was Shaftesbury. This he dedicated to the Virgin, and endowed with a hundred hides of land, and gifted with many important rights, —rights which were respected at the Norman



invasion, when the abbess became recognised as a lay baroness, holding baronial courts and leets; furnishing her quota of soldiers, having right of "sea-wreck" in her manor of Kingston juxta-Corfe, a market, and two fairs at Kenelbury, and free warren throughout many manors.* In this abbey Alfred's second daughter, Ethelgiva, took the veil, and became first abbess; and for many ages was the abbey of Shaftesbury celebrated as a place of education or a fit asylum for high-born women: Malmsbury, more than two hundred years after its foundation, celebrating it as the residence of "sacred virgins and chaste widows, in whose manners a graceful modesty is so blended with calm elegance that nothing can exceed it."

The second conventual establishment, Wilton, was originally founded by Wulstan, duke, or ealderman of Wiltshire, for secular priests in 773. This establishment subsequently became a convent for nuns, under the rule of Alburga, widow of Wulstan, and sister of Egbert. It is probable that in the preceding century this convent had fallen into decay, for

* *Vide* "Monasticon," vol. iii.

we find that Alfred built another near the same spot, and transferred the nuns of the older establishment to his new foundation.* This abbey was also dedicated to the Virgin, and, like Shaftesbury, possessed baronial rights. Its first abbess was Radegunde, daughter of Ethelston, earl of Winchester, and it maintained its high character for many centuries as a convent school, Editha, the wife of Edward the Confessor, as well as the good Queen Maude, having received their education here.

The third abbey was founded by king Alfred late in life; it was in his royal city of Winchester, and in the vicinity of the palace. This was St. Mary's of Winchester, or Nunaminster, and, like the others, was richly endowed and gifted in after times with baronial privileges. Here the wife of Alfred retired on his death and spent her remaining days, and here Eadburga, his grand-daughter, was appointed first abbess. It is of Eadburga, the fifth daughter of Alfred's successor, Edward the elder, that Malmsbury tells the pretty story,

* *Monasticon*, vol. iii.

how that when a little child her father, anxious to learn her future vocation, led her into a room where jewels were displayed in the most tempting profusion, while beside them the chalice and book of the Gospels were placed. But bracelet and necklace, says the admiring chronicler, were passed by unnoticed, while she eagerly seized with her little hands the Volume of Salvation. Such a decision was sufficient in the tenth century to point out the child as a candidate for the veil, and the little Eadburga was consigned to the cloister, where long and happily she lived, little envying those of her sisters to whom had been assigned a loftier but less tranquil lot.*

To the education of his daughters Alfred

* The marvel of this choice of the little Eadburga will be considerably lessened when it is remembered that on their chalices, and on their books of the Gospels, the Saxons lavished their richest and most elaborate ornaments. The chalices were often gold, highly wrought and adorned with gems, while the covers of the Gospels were frequently of beaten gold, and sometimes of ivory, inlaid with gold and precious stones. In the abbey-church of Glastonbury the golden covers of the book of the Gospels weighed *twenty pounds*, and the copy which St. Wilfred presented to York cathedral was written in golden letters on purple vellum, and inclosed in a rich gold casket.

paid great attention, and they appear to have been worthy of his name. The second Ethelgiva became, as we have seen, abbess of Shaftesbury; his youngest, Alfritha, married Baldwin, count of Flanders; but his eldest daughter, Ethelfleda, is described by all the contemporary historians as possessing a greater share of his talents and energies than any of his other children. She was married early in life to Ethered, ealderman of Mercia, and appears to have distinguished herself during her father's lifetime by the wisdom of her counsels. On the accession of her brother Edward the elder, we are told that she became his chief adviser; and on the death of her husband Ethered, in 912, Edward appointed her "lady of the Mercians,"* a name by which she is more frequently designated than by that of Ethelfleda. Her government of this important portion of the land was judicious and vigorous. The same year that she was appointed she built the fortresses of Shergate and Bridgenorth, and in the following year the Saxon Chronicle relates that she went with all the Mercians to Tamworth, and built the fort

* Saxon Chronicle.

there ; also one at Stafford, and in the autumn one at Warwick. Three years after, according to the same venerable authority, “ the innocent abbot Egbert, having been slain by the Welsh, she within three nights sent an army into Wales, and stormed Brecknock, and took the king’s wife and other noble women.”

Within two years after, “ the lady of the Mercians” added the town of Derby to Mercia, and, in 920, “ took the town of Leicester without loss, and the greater part of the army submitted to her. The people of York also promised, and confirmed it, that they would be of her interest, and had begun to take the oaths,” thus taking the first steps toward the incorporation of the kingdom of Northumbria with Mercia ; but, “ twelve nights before midsummer, in the eighth year of her holding the government of the Mercians with right dominion, she departed, and her body lieth at Gloucester in the east porch of St. Peter’s church.” * The loss of so active a coadjutrix was bitterly lamented by Edward, who, though a wise and active king, does not seem to have

* Saxon Chronicle.

possessed those military talents which were so pre-eminent in his sister. It is, however, very probable that "the lady of the Mercians" possessed like her father more valuable qualities than mere warlike skill. She is represented by Malmsbury and Higden as an active restorer of those towns within her dominions that had been destroyed during the Danish invasions; and so warmly did popular feeling dwell upon the deeds of the wise and valiant Ethelfleda, that in the curious old chronicle of England, which details in rude numbers the doings of our kings, from the apocryphal days of Brute, down to those of Edward the First, the minstrel turns aside from the celebration of Edward the elder to sing the praises of "the lady of the Mercians."*

With his father's example before him, and

* *Vide* Ritson's "Metrical Romances," vol. ii. Toward Ethelfleda's only child, Halfwina, Edward seems scarcely to have acted an uncle's part. On the death of her mother, Halfwina seems to have been recognised by the Mercians as their "lady;" but the king within a short time carried her away into Wessex, and incorporated Mercia with his own dominions. His plea was that she had received offers of marriage from Reinold the Dane. Although Mercia was now incorporated with

the result of that example too, in the high attainments of his sisters, we are not surprised to learn from Malmsbury that Edward the elder paid strict attention to the education of his eight daughters. From his account, we find that "in their childhood they gave their whole attention to literature, and afterwards employed themselves in the labours of the distaff and the needle." Two daughters, beside the abbess Eadburga, took the veil in the abbey of St. Mary's, Winchester ; the rest were married.

But although learning was in some measure restored, the tenth century fell far below the seventh and eighth in literary zeal. We no longer meet with Latin poems addressed to a holy sisterhood, nor with abbesses engaged in extensive correspondence with foreign prelates.

Wessex, Northumbria was still under a separate sway, and to his son Athelstan first belongs the title of "king of the Angles." It is a strong incidental proof of the aversion of the Saxons to female rule, at least to the *supreme* rule, that although Edward had eight daughters, and most of them very superior women, Athelstan, his *illegitimate* son, was raised to the throne by them. According to Henry of Huntingdon, Athelstan was taught warfare by his aunt Ethelfleda.

The ignorance was too widely diffused even for an Alfred wholly to disperse, and succeeding monarchs were more anxious to become the rulers of all England, than to hold a more limited sway over a more educated people. Still the benefits of the conventual schools established by Alfred must have been widely felt, for while we read with disgust of the endless intrigues, and murderous feuds, and cold-blooded assassinations, which well-nigh fill up the whole page of Saxon history in the tenth century, we seldom meet with the name of queen, or high-born woman, save as engaged in acts of charity, or in attempting, too often unavailingly, to mitigate the barbarism of the times. One queen, however, to whom no such character can be given, meets us in this portion of our history, Elfrida, the second wife of King Edgar.

The story of the mission of Edgar's favourite thane, Athelwold, to the Earl of Devonshire, to inquire into the reported beauty of his daughter,—the admiration of the inquirer, his treacherous answer to the king, his subsequent marriage, and Edgar's visit, and the indignation of the wife when she found that a king had been willing to become her

sutor, the revenge of Edgar in the murder of Athelwold with his own hand, and Elfrida's hasty marriage with his murderer,—this story, and there is no reason to doubt its truth, has often been told; and from it we may well estimate the fierce and ambitious character of the step-mother, who, to make way for the accession of her own son to the throne, caused her son-in-law to be murdered within her own gates, and while raising to his lips the cup she presented to him.

But even in this instance the benefits of the conventual institutions, though in a widely different aspect, may be perceived; for when, stricken with a late remorse, the guilty Elfrida withdrew from the world, and built, in vain hope of expiation, the two noble monasteries of Ambresbury and Wherwell, to the latter of which she retired, the spectacle of the once beautiful, and proud, and luxurious queen, clad in hair-cloth, keeping perpetual fast, engaged in lifelong mortifications, and offering ceaseless prayers, must have afforded a more striking example of the just retribution of Heaven than even her public execution.

At a period when imagination and feeling

were strong, while the law was often powerless, the benefits of the convent as a place of penal confinement should not be overlooked. There the loftiest criminal was often compelled, by public disgust, by bitter remorse, in some instances by sincere repentance, to retire, and in the contrast between the gorgeous habits, the servile attendance, the luxurious fare of his former life, and the mortifications, which, although self-imposed, excited no admiration, an emphatic lesson was read to every one of the connexion of crime and its punishment.

The son for whom Elfrida incurred the guilt of her son-in-law's murder, grew up profligate, luxurious, and unworthy in his private character, as his father Edgar had been ; but, unlike him, weak-minded and spiritless. And it must have deepened the remorse of the mother to reflect that the imbecility of Ethelred might be attributed to her ferocious conduct towards him. When the little child heard of the death of his half-brother, he wept bitterly ; and we are informed by Malmsbury that his mother, in an ungovernable rage, seized a wax-taper that stood nigh, and beat the poor child so savagely that his life was actually in danger.

The same writer remarks, that such was the effect produced on Ethelred's mind, that to the end of his life he could not endure the sight of a wax-candle.*

The reign of Ethelred introduces us to an illustrious, but unfortunate queen, who, although not a native of England, exercised no little influence over its destinies, inasmuch as her marriage formed the first link in that chain of political events which led to Norman supremacy. This was Emma, the daughter of Richard, third duke of Normandy, who successively became wife of two, and mother of two, sovereigns of England.

According both to Norman and Saxon chroniclers, Emma was beautiful and intelligent, and at an early age was sent over to England to become the second wife of Ethelred.

* This story, although resting on very good authority, and consistent enough with the ferocious and impetuous character of Elfrida, has been rejected by some historians, apparently because the modern "taper" could not inflict a very severe punishment. It is therefore, perhaps, as well to inform the reader, that the "tapers" of the middle ages were from *five* to *seven* pounds weight; they were placed in candlesticks of silver, and formed a usual ornament of the lady's chamber.


This was in 1002, at a period when the kingdom was harassed by repeated incursions of the Danes, to whom Ethelred had, from time to time, made large payments, which naturally encouraged them to renewed invasions. As a powerful ally and coadjutor in his war with these enemies, Ethelred, it is said, sought the friendship of the valiant duke of Normandy,*

* All the descendants of Rollo seem to have possessed his reckless valour. This duke Richard is said to have been chosen by Ethelred the Unready as his father-in-law expressly on this account, as has been stated above. It is of this duke's father, appropriately named "Richard Fearnought," that Wace tells so naïvely the story of his encounter with the ghost, or the devil, for the worthy *trouvère* does not exactly decide the point, and which won for him his characteristic title. The story is curious; and as it affords a good specimen of a very characteristic work, almost unknown to the general reader, the following translation is offered.

Duke Richard was very devout as well as very brave, and he often walked out by night, and then—

"Whene'er an open church he found,
He entered in with fervent moans,
To offer up his orisons:
But if the doors were closed each one,
He knelt upon the threshold stone.

It chanced one night to an abbaye
He came, and entered in to pray;




and, to confirm that friendship, demanded the hand of his daughter. As the duke of Normandy was a Dane by descent, and 'as Emma's mother was "Gunnora, a Danish maiden of great beauty," according to Ordericus Vitalis, it is very improbable that Ethelred should have expected his father-in-law to aid him. It

For all his menye on were gone,
And he was in the dark alone :
So his good steed he straightway tied,
And entered in, when, lo ! he spied
A corpse upon its bier, (I trow
No fear even then did Richard know) !
For boldly by the bier he past,
His gloves upon a desk he cast,
And at the altar knelt to pray
(For nought could ever him affray).

Not long he stayed ere sound he heard,
As though the corpse on the bier had stirred ;
Then creaked the bier,—he turned to see
What this most fearful noise might be ;
And ' be thou good or bad,' said he,
' Lie still !' and then a prayer he said
(How long or short a time he prayed
I know not,) but the cross he made,
Saying, '*Per hoc signum sanctæ crucis*
Libera me de malignis,
Domine, Deus salutis :'

And also, ' God, Almighty Friend,
I to thine hands my soul commend !'



with his guilty connivance,—the disgraceful massacre of the unarmed and unsuspecting Danes throughout England took place. This cowardly deed was perpetrated in many parts with circumstances of atrocious cruelty: women, and even children, were put to death, not by ferocious men trained to crime and bloodshed, but by the Saxon inhabitants of the towns, where for years the Danes had peaceably dwelt; and by the *female* inhabitants, too, who, in many instances, with scythes and reaping-hooks, lamed those whom they were unable to kill: whence the name by which, for centuries, this disgraceful massacre was disgracefully celebrated — “Hocktide.”

Among the nobler Danes who were slain, the chroniclers especially mention the Lady Gunilda, sister of Sweyn, king of Denmark, —an illustrious woman, who, although the wife of an English earl and a Christian, was doomed to death, together with her husband and her infant son.


The feelings with which the young queen must have contemplated this massacre of those who, if not of her country, must have been viewed as her kindred on the mother's side,

have not been recorded ; but that the indignation of all Normandy was awakened we have the testimony of the Norman historians. So keenly, indeed, was that indignation expressed, and so strongly was the memory of this massacre impressed on the popular mind, that we find the Norman chroniclers, in recording the conquest of England, viewing that conquest as the stern retribution of Heaven for the massacre of the Danes on St. Brice's day.

The folly of Ethelred seems to have equalled his wickedness ; for however unprotected the Danish residents in England might have been, their brethren and their avengers were at that very time hovering on the eastern coast ; and early in the following year, under the conduct of King Sweyn, who had himself the murder of a sister and a nephew to avenge, they descended on the shores of Kent, and took a ferocious vengeance. The feeble monarch now attempted to buy off the invaders by a large sum ; they accepted the price and retired, but only to arrange their plans for a more extensive invasion the following year. Again was the country most oppressively taxed, and again the invaders withdrew. The following spring,

however, again saw them landing ; and each year, although bought off by a larger sum, they returned in greater numbers, until, in 1010, Sweyn found himself master of sixteen English counties, and received 48,000*l.* from the rest. Disgusted with the cowardice of Ethelred, and, probably, struck with the war-like qualities of the Danish invader, the Saxon population began to turn a favourable regard towards Sweyn ; and when he once more arrived in 1013, the northern counties, where, ever since the days of Alfred, a numerous colony of Danes had settled, welcomed him as their king ; the thanes of Mercia quietly submitted ; London, its chief city, opened her gates ; and Ethelred, in the ancient capital of the kingdom of Wessex, saw nearly the whole land beneath the sway of another monarch.

But the disasters which befel him as king, were not the only sources of anxiety to Ethelred the Unready. Surrounded by evil counsellors and profligate companions, he had, even from the time of his marriage, neglected his young bride, who was both beautiful and blameless ; and so bitterly did she feel his neglect, that she had determined to return to her father.



A reconciliation was, however, effected, and the messengers sent to fetch her returned : but the father-in-law from henceforth looked coldly on the son-in-law ; and when Duke Richard was succeeded by his son, the brother took up the cause of his sister, and refused Ethelred's repeated supplications for aid against the invaders.


Meanwhile Emma appears to have become very popular among the Saxons ; and we find her distinguished by a Saxon name indicative of high regard — Elfgiva,* the elf, or fairy gift. As Emma was an unloved wife, this appellation could scarcely have been bestowed by Ethelred ; it was, therefore, not improbably, bestowed by popular affection,—an affection which she seems to have merited by her conciliatory conduct : for we find her a munificent benefactress of the Saxon clergy and monasteries—a sure way to the affections of the Saxon people ; and emulating the skill of the Saxon high-born ladies in broidery, for she worked an altar-cloth for the monks of Ely. This altar-cloth is minutely, though not very

* Saxon Chron. Chron. Ramsey, and Ely.

clearly, described by the worthy chronicler. "It was of a green colour," says he, "and beautified with plates of gold that appeared raised: if viewed lengthways along the altar it seemed of a blood-red colour" (the silk was probably shot), and it was finished at the corners with rich gold ornaments which reached to the ground.* The abbey of Ramsey, as we find from the chronicle in the same collection, also shared her gifts; together with the various religious establishments of Winchester, where the first years of her married life were passed.

During the summer of 1013 the advancing army of Sweyn menaced the royal city of Winchester, and Emma with her two children,

* *Vide* Gale, vol. ii. p. 505.—These rich gold ornaments were of that kind of gold thread and bullion work termed, in the old metrical romances, "orfrays" (*aurifrisium*), and which, as we shall subsequently find, the Saxon ladies were very expert in making. The altar-cloth, green and red, was doubtless a shot silk. It is amusing to read the remarks of some excellent antiquaries on the silks of the middle ages. Some of these, the romance writers tell us, were of a "crimson green," and of a "grey purple." This description greatly puzzles the learned writers, who, probably, never entered a mercer's shop in their lives; but to the lady antiquary there is no difficulty in the question.



Edward* and Alfred, were compelled to seek refuge in the Isle of Wight, whither Ethelred soon followed. But the Danes still pressed southward, and Emma with her two children set sail for Normandy, taking among other treasures "an incomparable copy of the Gospels, such as had never been seen before in Normandy," says Jumièges, and which she presented to the church of St. Peter. From her brother, Emma received an affectionate welcome; he sent, too, for Ethelred; the feeble monarch gladly accepted the summons, and left Sweyn the undisputed possession of his kingdom. Within a twelvemonth Sweyn died, and while the Danes determined to elect his son Canute, the Saxons sent an invitation to their former monarch. But Ethelred was in no haste to return to a divided kingdom; he sent, however, his son Edward, and on his return he at length prepared to revisit England.

However unfitted Ethelred might be for the government of a kingdom at so important a

* It seems like a trait of affection for his murdered brother, that Ethelred should have named the eldest child of his second marriage Edward; there was a daughter also named Goda, who married the Earl of Boulogne.

crisis, he was received by his subjects with affection, for he was their own "natural born" king, and during the short remainder of his life he appears to have reigned well. In 1016, Ethelred died in London, and was buried with great magnificence in St. Paul's; his crown devolved to the son of his first marriage, Edmund, well named Ironside, from his persisting valour; and the contest now commenced between Edmund and Canute for the possession of London. After a long struggle, Canute raised the siege; and probably it was at this period that Emma with her two sons retired to her brother in Normandy.

The reign of Edmund Ironside, though short, was glorious, and the Saxons enjoyed peace and protection, although the Danes still kept possession of the southern part of the kingdom. On his death in 1018, which was not without suspicion of assassination, and, according to some, with the guilty connivance of his Danish rival, Canute, with scarcely any opposition, succeeded to the rule of the whole kingdom. According to Malmsbury, it was with a view to conciliate the Saxon portion of his subjects that Canute made overtures to the Duke of

Normandy for the hand of his sister—a strong proof how attached the nation must have been to Emma, since marriage with her could not possibly have given Canute even the least additional *right* to the crown. According to the author of the “*Eulogium Emmæ*,” messengers bearing both “right royal gifts and earnest supplications proceeded to Normandy, from whence, having received a favourable answer, they returned with the lady, whom the Danish prince most joyfully married.” A later chronicler, Jumièges, adds the curious story that Canute, on Emma’s arrival in London, “fearing that she should be carried away from the city by the Saxon soldiery” (probably those who had fought under Edmund Ironside), “married her in a few days, giving to the whole army *her weight in gold and silver*.”*

* Jumièges. Du Chesne, p. 253.—Some writers have very unjustly censured Emma for marrying Canute, forgetful that Emma, as a daughter of the Duke of Normandy, was herself of Danish descent ; and probably, too, ignorant that her mother Gunnora was actually a Danish maiden. But even had Emma been a Saxon, there does not seem to be any ground of objection to her second marriage ; for Canute neither killed her husband, nor did her any injury. Nor was her marriage disgracefully precipitate ; for the reign of Edmund Ironside, a period of full eighteen

Although certainly older by several years than Canute (for he was but twenty-one at his

months, succeeded the death of Ethelred: so that, allowing for the embassy to Normandy subsequently to Canute's accession, her period of widowhood will well-nigh approach the "regulation standard" of two years. One curious, and in some respects important point, seems to have been overlooked; it is, that Canute did not become a Christian until his marriage with Emma. Ordericus Vitalis, one of the most accurate and valuable of the Norman historians, expressly says, that Canute "was made a Christian and married Emma to preserve peace." Jumièges too remarks, that after having paid so largely for his bride, he married her "*Christiano more*,"—in the Christian form,—a phrase which could never have been used in referring to the marriage of persons brought up in the Christian faith. It is, therefore, most likely, that Canute continued a worshipper of "Thor the Thunderer" until his marriage, and perhaps, like Harold the Dauntless, "on the same morn he was christened and wed." Now, the circumstance of Canute being for the first twenty years of his life a votary of the fierce and sanguinary creed of Scandinavia, affords great palliation of his crimes. He was a fierce and most energetic character, and from the circumstances of his station he was placed above all control: what wonder was it, then, that those savage, haughty, and revengeful feelings which were cherished as religious duties by the Pagan Dane, should have too often overcome the gentler and nobler principles of the Christian faith? And thus, in the accounts we have of him, these opposing elements seem to have maintained an unceasing conflict to the end of his life.

accession), Emma seems to have had no cause to repent of her second marriage. We have proofs that Canute associated her with himself in the cares of government—she sat in the *witena-gemot*; letters are extant from prelates, in which “*Elfgiva the lady*,” as well as “*Cnute the Cyning*,” is addressed; and the chronicles of Winchester Cathedral and of the abbeys of Ramsey and Ely* bear abundant testimony to the influence of Emma over the mind of the newly converted king, by pointing to her as the source of that munificent liberality which the Danish monarch displayed toward these Saxon foundations.

To the monastery of St. Swithin at Winchester, Canute was a liberal benefactor; and that Emma was the cause, is evident from the circumstance that Alwyn, subsequently bishop of Winchester, retired to this abbey after he had relinquished the battle-axe for the scapulary, and became its sacristan. This Alwyn, who, from his connexion with the later events of Emma’s life, occupies a rather prominent place in the monkish chronicles, was a Norman of

* Ely was not a cathedral until the reign of Henry I.

high birth; related it is said to the ducal family, and chosen to accompany Emma to England on her marriage, as superintendent of her household. In England he distinguished himself by his prowess, and rendered himself so acceptable to the feeble Ethelred that he created him Earl of Southampton: and the Norman earl did good service to the Saxon king in many a hard-fought battle with the Danes. He is said to have distinguished himself on more than one occasion against Canute himself, but on peace being ratified between Canute and Edmund Ironside, Alwyn retired from the world and took the cowl in St. Swithin's monastery. To his former antagonist Canute always proved himself a steadfast friend, and on the death of Alsine he raised him to the see of Winchester.

It was because Ramsey was a favourite monastery of Queen Emma's, that we find Canute offering such splendid gifts upon its altar; and Croyland* and Ely too, equally

* It was to this abbey that Canute gave, in addition to other and more valuable presents, "twelve beautiful white bear skins for the altars on festival days." The brown bear skin must have been common enough in England at

shared in his munificence. . And the chronicler relates how the king and the queen visited its shrines, and how devoutly the newly converted monarch knelt at its altars, and the royal gifts he then bestowed ; and how he again with his queen and nobles proceeded to Ely, and there, on the mere, listened entranced to the sweet church music, and “in the gladness of his heart,” says the chronicler, poured forth that pleasant rhyme,—

“ ‘ Merrie sungen the muneches binnen Ely,’

“and so on, which to this day is sung in public, and remembered in proverbs.” *


The munificent gifts bestowed by Canute on the various monasteries, and the rich mantles and robes “worked with golden eagles,” which he presented to their abbots, were sufficient to ensure him a favourable character in the pages of the monkish historian ; but there are traits of noble qualities, and of a high and generous and conscientious feeling, to be

this period, for the bear was not as yet extinct in our forests ; but the *white* seems to have been viewed by the chronicler as quite a new thing, and worthy especial notice.

* Gale, vol. ii. p. 505. — Would it had been so to the present day !

found in this "royal Dane," that prove to us the title of "the Great" was not ill-bestowed.

The story of his reproof to his courtiers has a place in every history of England, although it is not generally stated, that from the sea-shore the king proceeded to the minster, and there, humbly kneeling, took the crown from his head, which was of great value, and with tears offered it to Him who alone ruleth the sea. Another story, quoted by Mr. Turner from Saxo, while it exhibits the ferocity of this half-barbarian monarch, forcibly shews his deep repentance. Canute, in a fit of intemperance (the vice of the Danes scarcely less than the Saxons), had killed a soldier. On coming to himself he assembled his troops, charged himself with the crime, and casting himself on the ground before them, with many tears bade them name his punishment. The rude soldiers were surprised, and touched at this self-condemnation of their haughty leader, they burst into tears, and bade him name his punishment himself. Homicide was rated at forty talents (this was probably for a king), but Canute fined himself the enormous sum of



three hundred and sixty talents of silver and nine of gold, and paid down the whole.

Full eighteen years did the union of Emma with Canute the Great continue ; she bore him two children, Hardiknute and Gunilda, a princess early distinguished for exquisite beauty : but although surrounded by every outward advantage, she had still cause for anxiety. Canute, fierce, and jealous of Saxon competitors for the crown, had sought on his accession the murder of the two young sons of Edmund Ironside, who with difficulty escaped to Hungary ; and thus, dreading perhaps to awaken his jealous feelings toward the two sons of her former husband, Emma was compelled during the whole period of her marriage with him, to keep them in Normandy.

In 1036, Canute died at Shaftesbury. Whether he made that distribution of his possessions which has generally been stated is uncertain, but eventually, by the decision of the nobles, the kingdom was adjudged to Harold, the eldest son, with the exception of the city of Winchester, which, according to some historians, together with the royal treasure, was awarded to Emma, to be held in

trust for her son, Hardiknute, who at this period was in Denmark. That the city of Winchester, then the chief city of the kingdom, should have been awarded to Emma, is, however, most unlikely ; it is very probable, therefore, that the treasure left to her, being at Winchester, has caused this error.

What had previously been the conduct of Harold toward his mother-in-law, no chronicle enables us to ascertain ; but from an allusion in that very obscure and turgid piece of declamation, the "*Encomium Emmæ*," it appears that, while Emma bitterly mourned the loss of a husband who had ever treated her with respect and affection, she looked forward with the most anxious apprehension to the reign of his successor. Nor were her fears unfounded. One of the first acts of Harold was to seize the royal treasures ; and then, perhaps fearing that the Saxon portion of his subjects might seek to place either Edward or Alfred, the sons of their Saxon monarch, on the throne, he caused letters, as though from their mother, to be forged, inviting them to come to her at Winchester.

Not suspecting the forgery, the two princes



set out; but by some means, Edward, the eldest, was induced to return. Alfred, however, arrived in England with a numerous suite, where he was welcomed by Earl Godwin, and by him conducted to Guildford, on his road to Winchester, where a sumptuous entertainment was provided. The night closed in, and when the wassailers were asleep, they were disarmed, bound, and all,* save eæh "tenth man, butchered like swine," while Prince Alfred received his death-wounds under circumstances of atrocious cruelty, and was carried to the abbey of Ely, where he soon after died. The unhappy mother, on receiving the intelligence, fled from the kingdom; but Normandy she dared not enter, for her brother was dead, and her infant nephew was unable to protect her; and to Denmark, to her younger children, she dared not go, lest the rage of Harold should be awakened against his half-brother. Friendless, desolate, almost without means of subsistence, the widow of Canute the Great besought the protection of the Earl of

* According to Simeon of Durham, *sixty* of these were murdered.

Flanders ; and at the court of Count Baldwin she received protection and kindness, and from him ultimately an asylum at Bruges, until the death of Harold allowed her to return.

In 1040, Hardiknute was summoned from Denmark to the throne of England, and once again prosperity was the lot of Queen Emma. It was during the reign of Hardiknute, that his sister Gunilda, a damsel of exquisite beauty, was married to Henry III., emperor of Germany. This alliance seems to have been equally gratifying to the king and to the people. The nuptials were celebrated with such extraordinary magnificence, that Malmsbury, writing full one hundred years after, remarks, that "the splendour of the marriage pageant is, *even to our times*, frequently sung in ballads in the streets." How willingly might we give up all that the prosing author of the "*Encomium Emmae*," and the scarcely less prosing Rudborne, has written, for a mere fragment of this genuine historical ballad !


But although the song that celebrated Gunilda's gorgeous marriage pageant has passed away, the ballads which told her romantic after-history have come down, changed in language,

and perhaps partially in form, but still true to the main incidents of the story, even to our day. Although Gunilda, like her mother, was beautiful and blameless, she became the object of cruel suspicions to her husband, and at length was charged with infidelity. Her accuser was a man of giant strength and stature; and when she sought—a stranger in a strange land, and, perhaps, an object of dislike, for a champion, none could be found to proffer aid save a young page, a mere boy, whom she had brought from England. But Gunilda felt strong in her innocence; her young champion encountered his giant opponent, overthrew him, and compelled him to acknowledge his falsehood. The emperor bowed to the decision of Heaven, and offered to take back the empress; but Gunilda, indignant at his unjust suspicions, and grateful to Providence for so miraculous a deliverance, retired to a convent, where she soon after died.*

* A ballad in Percy, which is evidently much older than it appears in its present form, is singularly true to tradition; for it makes her the wife of a king of Germany. An important corroboration of the story is supplied by her epitaph, discovered some time since in the Church of


During the short reign of her son Hardiknute, Emma seems to have enjoyed both respect and repose. Whatever were the faults of Hardiknute, his conduct towards his mother was, according to the testimony of every historian who mentions her, most praiseworthy. She was treated with all the honour due to the widow of two monarchs; and in the grants made by Hardiknute to her favourite monasteries, her name is associated with his in the charters. The monkish historians, indeed, exhibit much discrepancy in the estimate of this young king's character; for, while Malmsbury and others represent him as distinguished for profligacy and hard drinking, the chronicler of Ramsey abbey, and Henry of Huntingdon, unite in praising, not merely his liberality, but his general good conduct. For that, which has been always pointed out as the greatest

St. Donat, Bruges, where she was buried. It is in memory of "the most noble lady Gunilda, daughter of Canute, king of England, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, the most praiseworthy wife of the Emperor of Germany, who, after having received the heaviest injury (*gravissimam injuriam*) from her husband, died in this castle of Bruges in 1042."—Vide Sir H. Ellis's "Introduction to Domesday," vol. ii. p. 137.



stain on his memory—his causing the body of his half-brother, Harold, to be dug up after burial, and cast into the Thames—some excuse may be found in the recollection that Harold had not only seized his mother's treasures and forced her to flee, perhaps for her life, but that he had caused the murder of Alfred, who was also half-brother to Hardiknute. The exhumation of Harold's body was, therefore, probably a rude revenge ; certainly not to be excused, but greatly to be palliated, especially when we remember that Hardiknute passed his youth in Denmark amidst a ferocious people. According to Simeon of Durham, Hardiknute kindly invited his surviving half-brother, Edward, to his court, and received him with attention and honour. His reign, however, was short, and a feast is said to have been the disgraceful cause of his death ; but in the degraded state of Saxon morals, a poisoned draught might have produced it ; and Edward, unopposed, succeeded.

It is probable that Emma now believed all her sorrows to be ended ; for Edward had passed a blameless youth, and if he had never been remarkable for warlike qualities, the gen-




tleness of his character, and his devout, though superstitious feelings, gave promise of a tranquil, perhaps a happy reign. But Edward had passed the greater part of his life in Normandy ; and although of the genuine Saxon race, he returned surrounded by Norman courtiers, and prepared to look with disgust upon whatever was English. In this feeling his mother seems never to have participated ; although Norman by birth, she had become almost Saxon by long residence, and she dwelt at Winchester surrounded by Saxon attendants.

The particulars of the last and severest trial that Emma was called to sustain can with difficulty be ascertained.*

According to Malmsbury, Edward, soon after his accession, deprived his mother of all her property, "because she had for a long time mocked at the needy state of her son : nor did she ever assist him ; transferring her hatred from the father to the child, for she loved Canute, both living and dead, better than her first husband." But he gives a farther

* Although this incident in the life of Emma is passed over by some of our best historians, I cannot see any sufficient reason for its rejection. Malmsbury expressly




reason, "she accumulated money by every method, regardless of the poor, to whom she would give nothing; therefore it was taken away, that it might aid the poor and replenish the king's exchequer." This reason is probably the true one, since what with his rapacious Norman courtiers, and the no less rapacious Earl Godwin and his family, Edward's exchequer was seldom overflowing.

The argument, that because Emma did not give to the poor—an assertion made by Malms-

states that Edward deprived his mother of her lands; but that she was restored to them again, we have the testimony of the documents in Winchester cathedral, to which she bequeathed several manors. That the story should not be found in the Saxon Chronicle is not to be wondered at, because, as Emma was not a queen regnant, she might be considered as a private person. As to the contemporary Latin chroniclers, their blind admiration of her saintly son would effectually prevent them from giving currency to a tale which represented Heaven by a miracle declaring him to be wrong; it is, therefore, not unlikely that such a story would be found only in the records of the cathedral where the trial took place. The "*Encomium Emmæ*," to which reference has been made, leaves off at the accession of Hardiknute, otherwise we might have had a valuable corroboration or contradiction of this story; Robert of Gloster, however, views it as a well-fact, and relates it very minutely.

bury alone—her son had therefore a right to deprive her of her own property, has little appearance of justice ; that it was a *convenient* argument, however, there can be no doubt. According to Rudborne, a monk of Winchester, and nearly contemporary with Malmsbury, the cause of King Edward's proceedings against his mother is stated to have been, suspicions that she and Alwyn, bishop of Winchester, had been accessory to the cruel murder of her own son and his brother Alfred.

The horrible character of this charge, no less than its extravagance—for what could Emma gain by the death of her son?—renders it scarcely possible for us to believe it to have been made : we, however, know, that Earl Godwin was eager to throw the burthen of this crime from himself upon others, and that he was at this time high in favour with the weak king ; and we also know that Robert, the monk of Jumièges, who afterwards became Archbishop of Canterbury, and who was the spiritual adviser of the king, hated, with no common hatred, the Bishop of Winchester. In what way the suspicions of the king were excited against his mother we know not, but we find from Rudborne, that he not



only deprived her of her possessions, but placed her in confinement at Wherwell monastery, and committed Alwyn, the bishop of Winchester, to prison. While at Wherwell, Emma wrote to the archbishop and prelates, asserting her innocence and demanding trial by ordeal.* To this the council assented, and Emma was removed to Winchester the night before, when she visited the shrine of St. Swithin, and supplicated his aid. There, while still kneeling, oppressed alike by sorrow and long watching, Emma fell asleep; but her dreams were pleasant, for she saw a venerable old man bending over her. "Be thou firm, daughter," said he; "I am Swithin whom thou hast invoked, fear

* In Mr. Turner's interesting chapter on the ordeal he mentions only two kinds—that by plunging the arm into boiling water, and that by the hot iron, which consisted in snatching a bar of iron, three pounds weight, from the fire when red-hot, and bearing it the distance of nine feet. This latter would evidently have been a most unjust mode of trial for a high-born lady, whose delicacy of skin, and unaccustomedness to the bearing of weights, would have ensured her failure. The ploughshares were, therefore, probably substituted; and the intention seems to have been, that she should step *between* them. Rudborne, however, expressly says, she stepped *upon* them; but then he is determined to relate a miracle.



not : when thou passest through the fire it shall not hurt thee, for thy son hath done evil in this." No wonder was it that Emma arose comforted, and quietly awaited the time when they were to lead her to the church.

"As the day dawned," says Rudborne, "the choir was swept, and nine ploughshares laid in order on the pavement. The clergy and the people hasten thither ; the king being seated in the choir, his mother is brought forward, and thus she said : 'O lord and son, I, that Emma who bare and brought thee forth, am charged with crime against thee and Alfred my son. I invoke God to bear witness this day in my person, that I may perish if what has been charged against me ever entered even my mind.' Then the ploughshares having been blessed, the queen was prepared ; and her shoes having been taken off, her mantle laid aside, and her robe girded about her, she was led by two bishops to her trial. There, as the hand-maiden of Christ went onward, those who led her, weeping, yet urged her to fear not. Then," as the wife of Canute the Great, whose bones lay within that very church, which he had so richly endowed, stood an object of scorn or of pity,

“the cry arose on every side, ‘St. Swithin! St. Swithin! save her.’ But Emma, silent in heart, without audible voice, with uplifted eyes, wimpled but with a kerchief, as she was led to the nine ploughshares, which she was to pass over nine times, addressed this prayer to God: ‘O God, who deliveredst Susanna from the wicked elders, who freedst the three children from the fiery furnace, do thou deliver me from the burning of this fire by the intercession of St. Swithin.’ So stepping upon all the ploughshares, and bearing her whole weight upon each of them, she neither saw the irons nor felt the burning; and therefore she said to the bishops, ‘When shall I approach them? why do you lead me without the church when my trial is to be within?’ And thus she proceeded to the end, not knowing that her trial was past. Then the bishops replied: ‘Lady, look behind thee, thou hast even now done;—all is finished which thou thoughtest was yet to do.’ Then her eyes were unbound, and then she looked back and saw the ploughshares, and knew the miracle.”* Her saintly son was now enforced to acknowledge his mother’s innocence,


* Rudborne, “Anglia Sacra,” vol. i. p. 290.

proved as it was said to have been by the aid of St. Swithin himself : he fell at her feet, beseeching her pardon with many tears : nor was he contented until a wand having been put into her hand, she was compelled to give him three blows.

To propitiate St. Swithin, the king bestowed three manors on the cathedral. Emma gave nine, and their names are specified, in memory of the nine ploughshares. Bishop Alwyn gave nine also ;* and Rudborne moreover informs us, that the ploughshares were buried in the west cloister of the cathedral.

Restored to her possessions and to her queenly dignity, Emma passed her last years at Winchester, probably in St. Mary's abbey, and laid down the burthen of a life, singularly chequered with misfortune, in March 1052. She was buried in Winchester cathedral, beside the remains of her second husband Canute, and her son Hardiknute, where her tomb remained

* Alwyn is said to have survived to the time of the battle of Hastings, to have joined Harold on the field accompanied by twelve monks, and true to his Saxon feelings, Norman though he was, encouraged him to fight for his crown. This tale is, however, very apocryphal.



until destroyed at the disastrous siege of Winchester, in the reign of Stephen, bearing an inscription in rude Latin rhyme, which told that the queen who reposed beneath had been wife to two, and mother of two kings of England.*

It seems to have been the lot of the saintly Confessor to have been unable to appreciate the high qualities of his female relatives ; for although the husband of the beautiful and learned Editha, his conduct toward her was marked by the same injustice and harshness which he had displayed toward his mother.

Editha was the eldest daughter of Earl Godwin, a name well remembered in the history of this period, not only because from a mere herd-boy he arose to be the companion and relative of kings, but because his savage ferocity and boundless ambition involved him and his sons in those feuds and intrigues which hastened, even if they did not originate, the Norman invasion. Of the early history of Editha, that "rose from a thorny stem," as Henry of

- * " Hic Emmam cista, reginam continet ista,
Duxit Ethelredus rex hanc, et postea Canutus.
Edwardum parit hæc, ac Hardicanutum ;
Quatuor hos reges vidit sceptrā tenentes
Anglorum, regum fuit hæc, sic mater, et uxor."

Huntingdon gracefully terms her, we have but few notices, except that she was educated in the abbey of Wilton, the same convent in which the good Queen Maude was subsequently educated, and that she there distinguished herself by her learning.

On Edward's accession to the throne, Earl Godwin bent all his energies to arrange a marriage between the king and his beautiful daughter. According to Edward's panegyrists, this was the most difficult task that Godwin had ever attempted : for the king, who had remained unmarried more than forty years, and had always expressed strong attachment to a cloistered life, resisted the proposal of his marriage with more energy than his feeble character might have warranted. The witenagemot was therefore summoned, and, under the direction of the powerful earl, offered their advice that the king should marry. Still Edward refused ; according to one of his eulogists he actually besought Heaven to prevent his union with one of the most accomplished of Saxon maidens, and one whose beauty Malmsbury declares " excited the warmest emotions, and whose bosom was the seat of every refined feeling : " but Heaven

wrought no miracle to prevent the marriage, and Editha became the nominal bride of King Edward the Confessor.*

If we believed the testimony of Edward's panegyrists alone, this reluctant marriage was productive of great mutual happiness. From other sources we however learn, that as Edward received his wife only because he dared not reject the daughter of the powerful Earl Godwin, so, according as the influence of the father or of Edward's Norman favorites predominated, was the wife treated with the honours due to a queen or driven with contumely from her husband's court. Thus when, on the occasion of the violent quarrel between Edward and Earl Godwin, in 1052, the father and brothers fled away, the hostility which the feeble king had not dared to manifest toward his powerful father-in-law and warlike sons, he displayed toward the unoffending daughter and sister; and he sent Editha, with only one mean female attendant, to Wherwell monastery, and committed her to the strict custody of the abbess. But Earl Godwin ere long returned and drove

* Ailfred Reivesby. Twysden.

the king's foreign favorites from the court, and then, but restored by the father, not by the relenting husband, Editha returned to the palace, and resumed the state of a queen.

A very pleasing picture of Editha, about this period, is given us by Ingulphus, in one of those incidental narratives which throw so much light upon character and manners, but which, unfortunately, are too unfrequent in the monkish writers. He tells us that, being a native of London, he was sent, at a very early age, to Westminster, to school, where "I have often seen that fairest lady, so eminently skilled in learning, while yet being a boy I was staying at the king's court with my father; and often when I came from school would she question me respecting literature and poetry; and most pleasantly passing from the foundations of grammar to playful logic, in which she was well skilled, she would entangle me in a subtle band of argument; and she would then cause her waiting-maiden to give me three or four pieces of money, and send me to the palace larder for refreshments." *

* Ingulphus, p. 62. Gale. The subtleties of logic here referred to, seem to be that habit of public disputation

But literature and logic did not engross the whole of the fair queen's time. Like other Saxon women of high birth she often employed herself in fine needle-work ; and although King Edward, on ordinary occasions, was accustomed to dress with a saintly plainness, on solemn festivals he arrayed himself " right royally," and his gorgeous robes, which were interwoven with gold, were adorned, as Malmsbury informs us, with the most exquisite embroidery, the work of his accomplished queen. She also appears to have distinguished herself as the kind patroness of the convent in which she received her education ; and according to Camden, who, however, contrary to his usual custom, does not quote his authority, she rebuilt Wilton abbey of stone, (it having been until then, like most of the other Saxon buildings, of wood), about the same time that the king was engaged in building Westminster abbey.

which was so greatly encouraged during the middle ages, and which even schoolboys were taught. Fitz-Steven, describing the London schools about a century after, refers to the disputations held by the scholars, and which it was thought improved their intellect. The Saxon queen therefore probably affirmed some paradox, and kindly encouraged the schoolboy to oppose it.

Within a short time after her return to the palace, Editha lost her father, Earl Godwin, and under circumstances calculated to awaken her keenest sorrow. Although the various writers do not agree in the precise detail of facts, they yet concur in representing his death to have taken place at a public banquet, where some allusion was made by the king to his brother Alfred's death, and the share Earl Godwin took in it. Thus publicly charged, the aged earl protested his innocence, and even called on Heaven to avouch it. The appeal was awfully answered, for Earl Godwin fell from his seat, and, never speaking again, died soon after.

The death of her father does not seem to have exercised any injurious influence on the domestic quiet of Editha ; the Confessor allowed her to continue in his court,—probably he feared awakening the anger of her scarcely less powerful elder brothers, Harold, Tostig, and Sweyn ; and devoted to his Norman courtiers, and anxious to introduce the habits and customs of Normandy into England, it seems difficult to account for the popularity which Edward enjoyed among his subjects.

The great men of his court were, however,

as partial to Norman innovations as their monarch ; for Ingulphus, referring to this period, expressly states that the Saxon nobles “ began to give up English customs, and to imitate the French in many things : thus they spoke French in their halls, as though it were a more gentle tongue, and began to adopt the mode of writing and the character of the French.”* A most important admission, since a subsequent passage of the same writer has been repeatedly quoted to prove that the adoption of Norman customs and of the Norman language and *character* (for the reader must bear in mind that the Saxon *letter* differs widely from our modern letter), was the hard penalty imposed by the pitiless Conqueror upon a vanquished race.

At one period the Saxons, who still viewed Normandy with alarm, must have had their hopes highly raised when the king summoned Edward, the only surviving son of Edmund Ironside, from Hungary, with his wife and three young children, Edgar, Matilda, and Christina, to his court : but soon after his arrival, in 1057, Edward died ; and although the king extended a fatherly care to the orphan children, causing

* Ingulphus. Gale.

them to be educated, according to Ordericus Vitalis, with as great care as if they had been his own, he again turned to Normandy in his choice of a successor, and the well-managed visit of his cousin, Duke William, soon after determined the weak king's ultimate decision.

Meanwhile, although becoming increasingly infirm, Edward devoted all his strength and all his mind, as he had already devoted immense treasure, for the completion of his great work, the abbey of Westminster.* The Norman architects who had been summoned over to execute this work, were urged to its rapid com-

* This work was meditated by Edward almost from the time of his accession to the throne, in lieu of a pilgrimage which he had vowed to make to the tomb of St. Peter at Rome. The earliest charter to the monastery is dated in 1045, and this is signed, first by the king; then by his mother, who names herself, "*Alfgitha Imma, mater ejusdem regis;*" and thirdly by his wife, who signs "*Eadgitha ejusdem collaterana regis.*" In the great charter of donations, twenty years after, on the day when the new church was consecrated, the king signs first, and then "*Ego Eadgitha regina, huic donatione regis, consenciens subscripsi.*" A second charter follows, dated the same day, and to this Editha's name is subscribed next to the king's, with the words, "I, the queen, with all alacrity of mind, have corroborated it:" (*omni alacritate mentis corroboravi*). — Vide "Monasticon," vol. i. "Westminster Abbey."

pletion, for the devout king feared that he should never behold the consecration of St. Peter's minster: but the work was diligently superintended by the queen when sickness compelled the king's absence, and the last Christmas festival which King Edward celebrated was honoured by the opening and consecration of the new church. A splendid festival was held in the adjoining palace, the nobles were summoned from all parts to attend, and Editha "providing all, arranging all, superintending all, filled the offices of both king and queen."* On Holy Innocents' day the abbey was consecrated in the presence of the king and queen, but Edward was removed from thence to his bed, where, on the 5th of January, he died, and was laid the next day within the church, at the dedication of which he had so lately assisted.

The attention which Editha bestowed on the king in his last illness, seems to have been duly appreciated by him. He is said to have bade her a kind farewell, and to have earnestly desired that she might retain possession of the wealth and lands with which she had been

* Ailfred Reivesby. Twysden, p. 401.

endowed, "firmly and freely;"* and his wishes seem to have been respected, both by her brother Harold, and by the Conqueror.

The close of the same year that witnessed the death of Edward the Confessor, witnessed the overthrow of Saxon power at the battle of Hastings, and the death of Editha's brother Harold, and her two younger brothers, Leofwine and Gurth, on that fatal field. Beyond the sorrow which she must have felt at their death, Editha was but little affected by this great revolution. The sister of him who had seized the crown, was also the widow of him who had bequeathed it to the successful claimant; and it was as the dowager queen of England, not as the usurper's sister, that William recognised Editha.


Her estates, therefore, which were very numerous, and situated in almost every county in England, were assured to her for her life; and even after the conquest we find her possessed in some instances of the right of transferring them; since she is mentioned in Domesday as having bestowed several parcels of land in dower upon one Alsi, who had married the daughter of Wluard, probably one of her attendants; and

* Ailfred Reivesby. Twysden, p. 403.

also as having granted eight hides of land, at Firl in Sussex, to the foreign abbey of Grestein. Another proof of the respect with which she was treated by the Conqueror is to be found in the honours he paid her on her death, and in the title "*Regina*" being assigned to her in almost every entry of her name in Domesday Book.

Where the last Saxon queen retired on the accession of William cannot be clearly ascertained ; that she spent the last years of her life at Winchester is however certain, and it is very probable, that although she does not appear to have taken the veil, she sought the retirement of St. Mary's abbey.

It seems very questionable whether the respect which the Conqueror expressed toward "Editha the queen," was extended toward any other of the female branches of her family ; for in 1068, we learn from Ordericus Vitalis, that her mother Githa, herself the daughter of Sweyn and half-sister of Canute, although at this period evidently far advanced in years, was compelled to quit England, and "having secretly collected her great riches for fear of William, passed over to France never to return."



An epitaph discovered some years since in the same church where that of Gunilda was found, makes us acquainted with the fact hitherto unknown, that Editha had a sister also named Gunilda, who retired to St. Omer's and took the veil, but eventually resided at Bruges, where in 1087 she died.* To this daughter, therefore, the aged Githa, the surviving mother of five warrior sons, all slain in untimely battle, most probably retired; while her immense landed possessions, amounting to 39,600 acres, were seized by William, and distributed among his followers.

From this period nothing more can be learned respecting Editha, excepting that in 1075 she died at Winchester, that she was conveyed with all honour from thence to Westminster, where her remains were deposited beside those of king Edward, and where soon after a splendid tomb, or shrine, "of delicately worked gold and silver, and of admirable beauty," was erected at the express command of William. Her estates on her death reverted to the crown.

The splendid tomb continued until the time when Henry III. commenced building the new

* Ellis's "Intr. to Domesday," vol. ii. p. 136.

church, and then the remains of Editha were removed, and after the erection was completed they were replaced in the aisle beside those of the "good Queen Maude," and a lamp was directed to be kept constantly burning before the tomb of the last Saxon queen.

Another Editha, more unfortunate than her namesake queen, and who has sometimes been mistaken for her, must have a notice here. This is "Editha the Fair," whose name occurs so often in Domesday Book, and whom the researches of Sir Henry Ellis have proved to be the widow of Harold.* This Editha was the daughter of the powerful Earl Algar, and sister to the two Saxon heroes, Edwin and

* The argument of Sir H. Ellis is founded on the fact that the earlier Editha is almost always styled "*regina*" in Domesday; to have termed her, therefore, merely "*pulchra*," would have been a derogation of her dignity, and contrary to Norman respect for rank. The other Editha bears that title in the Saxon Chronicle, and although she was wife of a king, she would not be designated as such in Domesday, since Harold is never termed king. At the same time that "Editha the Fair" occupied a rank little inferior to royalty is proved by her immense possessions, by her having a chaplain, and by her also having for a tenant a man of noble birth.—*Vide* "Intr. to Domesday," vol. ii.

Morcar. Her exceeding beauty is mentioned both by the Saxon Chronicle and by Jumièges, who terms her "the most beautiful Editha." In consequence of a treaty of her brothers with Griffin, prince of North Wales, Editha the Fair became his wife; and after his death, Harold, at that time a widower, sought her in marriage. The date of this marriage cannot be precisely ascertained; it probably took place but a short time previously to his seizing the crown.

As soon as the fatal result of the battle of Hastings was known, her brothers Edwin and Morcar marched to London; and fearing the treatment the widow of Harold might receive from the Conqueror, they sent their sister from thence to Chester.* Her lands, from the record in Domesday, were of royal extent, amounting to 27,600 acres; and her fee in Cambridgeshire was considered of sufficient value to form part of the rich reward bestowed by William upon Alan, first earl of Richmond.

The fate of "Editha the Fair's" family was as unfortunate as that of her sister-queen. Her brothers soon engaged in insurrection against Norman power, and in 1071, Edwin, who had

* Florence of Worcester.


formerly been betrothed to one of the daughters of the Conqueror, fell a sacrifice to his vengeance. The wide domains which Earl Algar, her father, had possessed, and which are said to have consisted of well-nigh one-third portion of England, were seized and divided among Norman strangers; and the widow of the prince of North Wales, and of the last Saxon king, sought the cloister, not merely as a secure retreat, but for a subsistence. The convent to which she retired, the date of her death, her place of burial, are alike unknown; and the record of her broad lands, and the fame of her beauty, are all that now remain to us of "Editha the Fair."

With the two Edithas, sisters in beauty, in royal state, and almost in misfortune, the first portion of our view of female society in England closes. And looking at the mournful details of public and domestic sorrows which the lives of these later Saxon queens present to us, we may well doubt whether Norman domination, crushing as it was, could bring severer sufferings to the noble and high-born women of the land, than did the misgovernment, the intrigues, the foreign invasions, and the sangui-

nary domestic feuds and assassinations of the last century of Saxon power.

Whatever were the popular rights—whatever were the rights conceded to women, by Saxon jurisprudence, and they were important—the turbulence, the lawlessness of this later period, rendered them well-nigh nugatory. The right of the strong hand was the only law recognised by the Leofrics, the Algars, the Godwins, of that day; and as vainly might the wife and mother of kings, as the poor tiller of the ground, demand justice or seek redress from those whose will was the sole law.


Oppressive and cruel were the results of the Norman conquest—that just retribution, as the Norman chroniclers believed it, on England, for the cruel massacre of the peaceful Danes;—still, at the distance of almost eight centuries, that conquest may be viewed as a severe but necessary remedy. To the land, after a period of fierce struggle, it brought rest and civilisation; its effects upon the condition of women we shall trace in the next chapter.



CHAPTER V.

Influence of the Norman Invasion on the Political State of the Saxons—The Feudal System—Influence of that System on Women—Saxon Laws unchanged—Superior Protection granted to Women under Norman Power—Did the Conqueror attempt to make Norman-French the National Tongue?—Influence of the Conquest on Saxon Female Monasteries — Benefits conferred on Women by the Social Improvements of the Normans.

WITH the battle of Hastings a new order of things arose. A change, scarcely less striking than that which was brought about by the Saxon invasion, took place in a few years ; and subjected to new political institutions, to new ecclesiastical rules, bowed beneath a foreign yoke, and an object of scorn to the haughty Norman, the Angle found himself well-nigh a stranger in his own land. How far this important change affected female society, and whether the Saxon lady had just cause to mourn over the results of that victory which



transferred the sceptre from the Saxon to the Norman dynasty, will be the object of inquiry in this chapter; and we shall proceed first to notice the effects of the political changes consequent on this great revolution.

Among the Saxons, all lands were held by allodial tenure; "the freemen were the absolute proprietors, with no other condition annexed to their tenures than that which resulted as a necessity from mere possession—the duty of defending by associate arms the soil which, as independent warriors in voluntary association, their arms had successively acquired."* Thus the whole land was parcelled out in various separate portions, and on each of these the Saxon landholder, surrounded by his domestics and bondsmen, enjoyed "a rude and solitary independence, subject to his sovereign alone."

Among the Normans, on the contrary, the feudal system had prevailed almost from their first establishment in France—a system "in which, by a rude species of legal fiction, every thing descended in acknowledged dependence from the throne, which was to be regarded as

* Dunham.

the sole original proprietor of the soil, and from which the nobility and chief vassals held the aggregate allotments of the soil, upon certain conditions of suit and service; the sub-vassals receiving again from these, on similar or more restrictive conditions, their inferior fiefs; and others again from them, successively to the minutest sub-divisions of territorial holding."

The reader will easily see from these two short descriptions, that the political change effected by the Conqueror was great, and peculiarly of a kind to arouse the indignation of all who possessed land, either in large or smaller proportions. At first sight, too, the feudal system seems to press more unfairly on women than that of allodialism. The suit and service which the vassal was bound to pay his lord, consisted of warlike offices wholly unsuited to female habits, and thus the circumstance of a woman holding land became of comparatively rare occurrence in those countries where the feudal system existed in all its strictness; while, as we have seen among the Saxons, women frequently became landholders, and King Alfred himself, bequeathed great part of his

lands to his daughters, although the kingdom became the specific portion of his son.

But the Saxon system we shall find, on closer inspection, was more beautiful in theory than in practice; for while it asserted the independent right of each landholder to the estate, whether large or small, which he possessed, it afforded him no means of securing himself in the possession of it, should a more powerful neighbour, with broader lands and a more numerous band of retainers, seek to claim it. The manors of Thurkil the White, or of the Lady Wynfleda, although duly entered in the abbey book, and the boundaries "by the running brook to the hoar maple, and along by the fosse way," described with a more than land-surveyor's minuteness, might be wrested from their owners by an Earl Algar or an Earl Godwin, and no redress be obtained from men who could set the monarch himself at defiance and direct the witenagemot at their pleasure.*

Now this could scarcely be done, or at least

* In observing in Domesday Book the immense possessions of the two earls mentioned above, it is impossible to believe that so many thousand acres and so many towns could have belonged to them of right; but,



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not so openly and flagrantly done, under the feudal tenure. Under this system the smaller landholder placed himself beneath the protection of the great landholder, whose tenure was from the king, and offered suit and service on the express condition of being guarded in the possession of his land. If the lord failed in his part of the contract, the vassal refused the specific service ; and thus in the history of our own country, as well as that of others, we frequently find the vassals making common cause with their injured brother, and unitedly demanding redress.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, while governments were unsettled and laws weak, and the social organisation scarcely developed, it was security and protection, rather than solitary independence that the smaller landholders required ; and on the same principle which leads us in the present day to pay willingly a portion of our property to secure us in the unchallenged possession of the remainder, did the vassal perform his stated period of

fortunately, the few chroniclers of this early period pass over very slightly the evil deeds of the theyn, or earl, although Norman rapacity is strongly painted.

military service beneath the banner of his lord, that the superior, with the whole weight of his powerful influence, might protect him against each foeman.

There was also an important principle developed, even if not originated, by the feudal system. This was the actually *new* light in which the superior and the inferior were viewed. In the ancient world but two distinctions existed, those of master and slave; but under the feudal system, the superior of the vassal was himself vassal to a higher lord; while the king himself, of whom all the chief barons held, was bound to consult with them, to yield to their just demands, and it was recognised as law both in France and England that "if justice were refused by the king to any of his vassals, that vassal might summon his own tenants under penalty of forfeiting their fiefs, to assist him in obtaining redress by arms."*

The general features of the feudal system were therefore far from being unfavourable to

* Hallam, vol. i. p. 175, who quotes the passage from the "Etablissmens de St. Louis." The reader will recollect that it was on this feudal principle that the barons took up arms against John.



freedom, since they followed out the great principle of reciprocal rights and duties. And for the same reason they were favourable to the condition of woman, who although not qualified to perform actual suit and service, had still her place, and no unimportant one, in a system which was that of regular and closely linked gradation. M. de Guizot, in the most philosophical of his works, has admirably traced the advance of female influence from the period of the first establishment of the feudal system in France, and has pointed out how the "castle life," stern and warlike, and devoid of softening influences, as it has hitherto appeared to the superficial observer to be, was in reality the nurse of the domestic virtues, and the sphere in which female influence first exerted itself to elevate and refine a barbarous but advancing age. And although from the superior privileges enjoyed by the Saxon women, and the lofty station assigned from so early a period to "*hlfædge*," the effects of this "castle life" can be traced with less distinctness in English history; still, that the lady of the castle in Anglo-Norman times exercised as wide a sway as the wife of the earl or theyn

over her extensive household, and a more effective influence over those more closely connected with her, is proved by the rapid advance, not merely of civilisation, but of that lofty feeling of respect for woman, which was alike the basis and the exemplification of chivalry.


But "while the conquest changed the proprietary body of England, it still left most of its civil institutions undestroyed, or at most only new named. The witenagemot survived in the parliament; and the ealderman, the knight, the geref, the freeman, the hundred, the wapentake, and the county court, were all preserved."* Nor did the laws that regulated social life and guarded property undergo any violent change, much less were they laid aside, as popular writers have so often told us, for the laws of Normandy. "If we consult the documents yet existing, it will appear that the positive influence exercised upon the legislation of the realm by the Conqueror, was of limited extent. According to ancient, though not contemporary authorities, the Conqueror, in the year 1070, summoned a great assembly, composed of such of the English who were distin-

* Turner.



guished by their nobility, their wisdom, and their legal knowledge, in order that he might become acquainted with the English laws. It is said that the recollection of his Scandinavian descent induced him to prefer the laws of East Anglia and Northumbria. Others assert the choice, whether of Norman or English, was left to the assembly ; but all concur in stating that the English with one accord demanded the restoration of the laws and customs known and used by them, not referring, as was afterwards supposed, to the laws, or any code, or statute, which the Confessor had granted, for, as we have already shewn, he only re-enacted the laws of Canute, but demanding the laws which had subsisted under the last legitimate king of the Anglo-Saxon race, and from whom the Conqueror derived his title to the crown. To this William assented, and a statute or capitulary, which, according to its coeval rubric, contained "the laws which King William granted to the people of England after the conquest, being the same which King Edward, his cousin, held before him, has been preserved in Romance and Latin." *

* "English Commonwealth," Palgrave, vol. i. pp. 54-55.



These laws, however well fitted for that state of society, had become well-nigh a dead letter during the turbulent reigns of Canute's sons and the feeble sway of their successor; but under the stern rule of William they were so no longer. He rigidly suppressed the lawlessness of the community, and that the Norman sovereign should be eulogised by a Saxon writer far from any partiality toward him, for "the good peace he made in the land," proves the success of his measures. The severe laws which guarded the honour of every class of women are also spoken of with approbation by the same venerable authority, and although we can scarcely believe literally that "a man of any account might go over his kingdom unhurt with his bosom full of gold," still the force of the phraseology emphatically proves the superior security of the Saxon himself under Norman rule, compared with that of his native princes.

And if the Saxon nobility were in so many instances unjustly deprived of their estates, and

The same able writer proves that the "Romance" version of these laws in Ingulphus is an interpolation, and as late as the time of Henry III.

the Saxon commoner, instead of looking up to a native lord, beheld the haughty Norman baron, still protection was his, the protection of the law, and the protection of the feudal system too, of which many a small landholder willingly availed himself, as Ingulphus indignantly remarks,—well pleased that by his forty days' service he could secure to himself the unchallenged possession of his land.

Now all these benefits to the land at large were most valuable to the female portion of the community; and that they suffered less from the consequences of the Norman invasion than most writers have supposed, may, we think, be proved from the statements even of chroniclers most bitter in their denunciations of Norman licentiousness and tyranny.

The fact that on the invasion of William many women fled to the convents and sought the protection of the veil as a guard against the insults of the Norman soldiery, has been often brought forward as a proof of the grievous oppressions under which the Saxon community laboured. But the equally well-authenticated fact that a very short time after—a time when, according to the self-same writers,


tyranny and injustice on the part of the invaders were at their height, these recluses supplicated leave to quit their convents and mingle again in the cares and pleasures of secular life, proves that the fears they had entertained were groundless, and that the Norman yielded that respect to Saxon women which, neither from the Danish invaders nor from the more powerful among their own countrymen, they had heretofore received.*

Very little can be ascertained in regard to the situation of the lowest class of women at this period. These were the bondswomen ; and that many availed themselves of

* Indeed that the convent, and the convent vow, were no security against the Danes, the records of nearly every Saxon abbey prove. Nor, judging from the conduct of some of the later Saxon kings, had they that respect for the vow of the nun which the victorious Norman exemplified. More than one of them is recorded to have forcibly carried away a nun from her convent, and that their example was followed by their nobles is illustrated by the Saxon Chronicle, which relates how Sweyn, the son of Earl Godwin, returning from a marauding expedition in Wales, forcibly took the abbess of Leominster from her abbey, "and having kept her as long as he listed, sent her back again." And yet these very writers never mention a similar instance of outrageous wrong on the part of the detested Normans.

the advantages proffered by the walled towns, where uninterrupted residence for a year and a day ensured them freedom, cannot be doubted; while that those who remained were not in a worse condition than when under Saxon rule, may be easily believed from the attention which the Conqueror paid to this class, directing the services of the serfs on each manor to be defined, that in future time more might not be demanded. Of that class of bondswomen whose services were domestic, we may also well believe that their condition was even improved, by falling into the hands of a Norman mistress.

In all peculiarly female work the Saxons, from the highest orders to the lowest, were eminently skilful, while the Norman women never seem to have practised any of those occupations which were the pride of the rival race. Thus the weaving maiden, and the maiden skilled in needle-work, though only on rude canvass, and coarse as the Bayeux tapestry, must have become objects of importance to the Norman female, who, for the first time in her life, on William's triumphant return to Rouen, had beheld the splendidly broided garments



of the Saxon nobles, which, as William of Poitou informs us, excited equal admiration with the beauty of the plate and jewellery, and the loveliness of the Saxon youth who wore them.

A curious instance of respect for women appears in the "Boulden Book," which records the inquisition made by the Bishop of Durham, about a century after, of the services due by the various orders of tenantry on his estates, and which probably were imposed at the period of the Conquest. In this book the duties of the villain, the "*cotmanni*," the "*firmarii*," are strictly defined; the money payment, the payments in kind, and the personal services, specifically stated; and while in every other instance the holder, or a given number of men servants are to perform the personal service, at harvest-time his whole household, excepting the mistress (*exceptâ husewifâ*), are required to give four days' labour in the harvest-field.*

* The following is one of the entries; it is worth inserting for the minute picture it gives of villain service: "In Bouldonare are 22 villains, and every one holds two bovats of 30 acre land, and they pay 2s. 6d. 'scot penny' (this was his share of taxes) and half a measure of oats, and 16 pennies of 'averpenynge,' and 5 wagon loads of

At first sight, this may appear to the reader not so much intended as a mark of respect to the mistress, as a necessary concession, since she might be required to provide food against the return of the household. In most instances, however, of the villain performing personal service, he was provided with food from his lord's table, and this was always the case in harvest time. To prepare the meals for the family, therefore, the "housewife" was not needed; for the purpose of guarding the dwelling a woman was evidently inadequate: it could therefore only have been in accordance with that widely diffused feeling of respect toward the mistress of the household—a feeling which, as M. Guizot has admirably shewn, was deepened and extended by the influence of the feudal system, that the mistress of the mere cottage participated in the respect shewn to 'wode lade' (firewood), and two hens, and 10 score eggs, and they work each year, three days in each week, excepting the seven of Pasch and Pentecost, and 13 days at Christmas, and in his work done in harvest, to reap 4 days with all his household, except the housewife. And moreover they shall reap three roods of oats, and plough three roods." The service of three days in each week was not demanded of the holder himself, but merely that he should provide one man.

the lady of the castle, and was exempted from a service which children, parents, and husband, were alike bound to pay.

If the Saxon writers are bitter in their complaints against William's civil policy, their indignation passes all bounds when they detail his ecclesiastical alterations. That the Saxon monk should see his native superior thrust from his office, and a stranger taking his place, must naturally have excited his anger ; and when he found that stranger introducing new, and stricter regulations into the convent rules, interfering with the schools, with the church festivals, even with the singing of the service ; * when, too, he found not only the venerable language of his fathers scorned, but the venerable *character* of that language thrown aside for the Norman, we cannot wonder that he viewed the Norman conquest as the very perfection of tyrannical injustice. But in the nineteenth century, while we pity the natural indignation of the writer, we have no reason to re-echo his complaints.

That England, even from the close of the ninth century, had forfeited that first-rate

* *Vide* Saxon Chronicle, under the year 1072.

character for learning, which even the best French writers acknowledge was justly her due in the seventh and eighth, is allowed by all; and that the strenuous exertions of Alfred scarcely survived the next generation, is also acknowledged. Meanwhile a taste so strong and over-mastering, that it might well be termed a passion for literature, sprang up in Normandy; and at the very period of William's accession to the throne of England, the lowly abbey of Bec, under the rule of the illustrious Lanfranc, had become a school of learning so eminent, that the first scholars of Europe bent their footsteps toward it.

In many important respects the Normans were certainly in advance of the Saxons; and in none more so than in the enlightened spirit that stood ready to receive advantages whatsoever, and whencesoever, were the hand that proffered them. Thus the elevation of Lanfranc, as utter a stranger to Normandy and her language as he was to England* and hers,

* Lanfranc was a Lombard, a native of the city of Pavia. Anselm, his successor, both in the abbacy of Bec and in the primacy of England, was also a native of Lombardy.



excited no jealous feeling in the breasts of the Norman monks ; nor when subsequently he became so high in favour with their duke, does ever even a word of regret escape the Norman writers, that the learned Pavian could not claim Normandy as his birth-place.

Far different was the case in England ; the foreign origin of the new prelates is unceasingly dwelt upon, and the elevation of the most illustrious scholar of Western Europe to the primacy, is viewed by them only as another proof of the crushing tyranny to which the Saxon was subjected.

As the charge so often brought against the Conqueror, of seeking to “ blot out ” the Saxon tongue and substitute the Norman, has a close connexion with his ecclesiastical measures,—the church in the middle ages being the great fountain of all learning,—it may be as well to introduce a few remarks respecting it under this head.

The story that the Conqueror caused all law proceedings to be conducted in the French language, although broadly stated by Ingulphus, is proved to be untrue, by the irrefragable testimony of the earliest law documents

themselves. Indeed, so far from the Norman William attempting to introduce the French language in law proceedings, "before the reign of Henry III. (well-nigh two hundred years after) we cannot discover a deed or a law drawn or composed in French. Instead of prohibiting the English, it was employed by the Conqueror and his successors, in their charters, until the reign of Henry the Second, when it was superseded, not by the French, but by the Latin language, which had been gradually gaining, or rather regaining ground; for the charters, anterior to Alfred, are invariably in Latin."* Indeed, had the writers who affirm the contrary, looked no further than the well-known pages of the "Monasticon," they would have found in the Saxon phraseology, and the Saxon character too, of William's earliest charters,—above all, in the title, by which he constantly styles himself "*Rex Anglorum*," "King of the *English*," the very phrase used invariably by the Saxon monarchs of the United Kingdom, and never, although by feudal law he was lord of the soil, subscribing himself "king of England :"


* Palgrave, "Commonwealth," vol. i. p. 56.



unquestionable proof that William respected the language as well as the laws of his newly acquired subjects.


But French did actually, to a certain extent, supersede the Saxon, and in the schools, from this period to that of Higden,—about the middle of the fourteenth century,—we know that the tongue of the invaders was the sole medium through which all the learning of the convent school was supplied. The reason for this, on closer inquiry, we shall, however, find to have been not a mere act of capricious tyranny on the part of the Norman teachers, but a necessity imposed upon them by the circumstances in which they were placed, when summoned to revive learning among a people who spoke a different tongue.

At the period when Lanfranc became archbishop of Canterbury, the convent schools of Normandy were, chiefly through his indefatigable exertions, well supplied with elementary books. These were naturally in the language of that people, and written too in the French character, which was also that of all Southern Europe. Now when the instructors appointed by Lanfranc entered upon



their duties, either their scholars would be obliged to learn the Norman tongue, to profit by the teaching offered them, or men, ready at once to begin the task of instruction, must have been thrown back in their career of usefulness to learn the Saxon. Here were scholars ready to impart that knowledge, for which all Europe thirsted, to a people who understood not their language. Which was the fairest, that the child should acquire his master's tongue, as the easy price of initiation into all the knowledge of the time? or the grown-up, perhaps aged man, be compelled to acquire a most difficult, and to him a barbarous language, and learn to write a new character too, merely that an ignorant race might be taught through the medium of their birth-tongue?

In the present day it is, indeed, astonishing that any intelligent writer should make that a charge against the Conqueror and Lanfranc, which has ever been made a commendation of our colonial system. A people, more ancient by far, and possessing languages which were spoken before Saxon even existed, are under our rule in the East. But to instruct



the young natives, have we translated our grammars and lexicons into the dialects of India? No, we offer them classical literature, through the medium of English alone, and no one thinks of pointing out this system as a grievous wrong.

The exertions made by Lanfranc to reform the Saxon monasteries, and restore the Benedictine rule, excited additional hostility against him. Many bishops were dismissed from their sees, and many abbots from their abbeys, for alleged incompetency. How far the charges brought against these ecclesiastics were true, at this distant period, and with our comparatively scanty records, we can scarcely ascertain. We must not, however, lose sight of a fact which goes far to prove that Lanfranc was actuated solely by conscientious motives. It is, that while from the beginning of the eleventh century to the date of Lanfranc's Constitutions* (1077), no single name of eminence meets us in our ecclesiastical records. Within the subsequent three parts of a cen-

* *Vide* Wilkins' "Concilia," vol. i., under the year 1077.

ture England could boast many an illustrious scholar. Nor were the encouragements to learning, any more than the advantages of the convent school, confined to Norman youth ; one of the first nurslings of these revived schools was the Saxon peasant Brekespeare, who, in the abbey of St. Alban's, commenced that career which ended at the Papal chair.

It is highly honourable, either to the female convents, or to the kind feeling of the newly appointed prelates, that we find no instances of dismissal of any of their superiors recorded. Judging from the scanty information we can collect, the female convents appear to have been under far better management than the male ; we may therefore believe that no alterations were made, because none were needed. On reference to the chief female establishments at this period, we find the names of the abbesses of Barking and Shaftesbury were purely Saxon ; of others the names are not known ; but no record whatever exists of the just rights of the convent being interfered with, either in the dismissal, or choice of a superior.

To many of these convents William was a liberal benefactor. He confirmed the privileges, and bestowed land upon Wilton;* to St. Mary's, at Winchester, he extended his patronage; and the monastery of Sheppy, (which, from its destruction two hundred years before by the Danes, had lain until this period in ruins,) was rebuilt and endowed by him in the later years of his reign.†

But, perhaps, it was in a social point of view that the benefits of the Norman conquest were most fully developed. Whatever were the pride and luxury of the Normans, in all the refinements and courtesies of social life they were far superior to the Saxons. A high sense of honour, a respect for his plighted word, distinguished the Norman too,—qualities which, at this period, the great men among the Saxons had very far lost sight of.‡

* Monasticon.

† Ibid.


‡ In the amusing "*Roman du Rou*" of Maistre Wace, we find many stories illustrative of the high sense of honour and of the courteous feeling which prevailed among the higher orders. According to his account, Duke Robert, the father of William, appears almost a knight of romance, so courteous and gentle is he. When he set forth on his

2 And in respectful feeling toward women, the Normans, even if they did not exceed, certainly did not fall short of the Saxons, for the splendid coronation of William's queen, at Westminster, in 1068, excited no anger; and so little was it considered as a derogation of their dignity, that among the officers of Matilda's household were the first nobles of the realm.

Nor do we find these nobles displaying that ferocious spirit of tyranny toward their dependants which the earls and theyns of the later Saxon period exhibit. In remarking this, allowance must be made for the con-

pilgrimage, he lodged on one occasion at the castle of a poor noble. Now to *pay* this noble for his entertainment would have been discourteous, while to leave him unrewarded would have been more so. Duke Robert, therefore, inquired if he played at chess (a favourite game even at this early period), and finding that he did, prepared to play with him, and laid down a rich gold chain that he wore, declaring he would forfeit it if he lost the game. Duke Robert was an excellent chess-player, as all knew well; but this time he played most carelessly, lost the game, and then presented the rich chain to the poor noble with many thanks for his hospitable entertainment.

As Duke Robert understood courtesy so well, he naturally expected to receive it; and thus, when he entered



duct of these nobles during the period of insurrection, when great and savage punishments were often inflicted upon their Saxon tenantry ; although even for these, some palliation may be offered in the fact that assassination was often resorted to by the oppressed Saxon,—a crime which beyond every other, even sacrilege itself, excited the detestation of the haughty, but high-spirited Norman.

It is curious that the tale of cruel oppression and generous self-devotion on the part of the pitying lady, which, more than any other

the palace at Constantinople, whither he had been invited by the emperor, but found that no seats had been provided for him—

“Then from his shoulders off he drew
His mantle ; on the ground he threw
It down, and sat himself thereon.
The converse ended, when each one
Rose to depart, he left it there,—
One of the Greeks with courteous care
Reminded him ; and to him brought
That mantle rich and fairly wrought,
That he might put it on, but he
Replied with true nobility—
‘ Where I have left it let it stay,
I carry not my seat away.’ ”
Vide “ Roman du Rou,” par M. Pluquet.

tradition, has taken fast hold on the popular mind—the story of the Lady Godiva of Coventry, has constantly been told as an instance of *Norman* tyranny.


But it was no Norman baron who thus oppressed his bondsmen until his lady could no longer endure to witness their sufferings, but it was Leofric, earl of Leicester, a noble of genuine *Saxon* race, and high in favour with his Saxon sovereign, who bade his wife ride unclothed through the market-place, ere he would grant the boon that her pity asked.* In the history of no Norman baron, (except, perhaps, Robert de Belesme,) fierce and overbearing as many of them were, do we find an equal instance of brutal and capricious tyranny.

* This lady subsequently became foundress of the cathedral at Coventry, and is stated by Brompton to have devoted all her treasure to this purpose, and to have sent for skilful goldsmiths to make the church ornaments. On her death-bed she bequeathed a precious “circlet of gems” which she wore round her neck, to the image of the Virgin in that church, praying that all who came thither would say as many prayers as there were gems in it. “And how much think you these gems were worth?” says the chronicler: “truly, by competent judges they were valued at one hundred marks of silver,” a sum well-nigh equal to 2000*l.* A horrible instance of barbarous revenge

The superior refinement of Norman manners produced a most beneficial influence on their social habits. The Saxons were a social and, indeed, an hospitable people; but their habits of gluttony, and, more especially, of hard drinking, rendered their festive meetings scenes of disgusting intemperance and riot, and not unfrequently of bloodshed. The Normans, although descended from the equally hard-drinking Danes, were never addicted to intemperance; while so opposed were they to the coarse feeding of the Saxons, that it is the complaint of more than one chronicler, that under the rule of the Norman sovereigns a man could scarcely obtain at the royal banquets one good meal for each day, while the Saxon monarchs were accustomed to provide *four*.

But most important to a people who were so soon to make those rapid advances in civilisation, was this superior refinement. The

occurred soon after. Tosti having quarrelled with his brother Harold, who was serving the Confessor with wine, quitted the hall and journeyed to Hereford, where Harold had ordered a mighty feast. There he seized his brother's servants, and cutting off their heads and limbs flung them into the wine and mead-vessels, and departed.— *Vide* Henry Huntingdon, p. 367.



vast assembly drawn from all parts,—and consisting of all the higher classes, which formed the Norman monarch's *cour plenière*,—found in social converse, in pleasant sports, in the tale of the *disour*, in the lay of the *trouvère*, that gratification which the Saxon thegn had found chiefly in the mighty feast, the brimming mead-cup, and the battle-song. And female society was now even more sought, and the softening and refining influence which the lady of the castle had exercised in the more limited sphere of “the castle life,” now had wider scope, and shed a ray of brightness over the stern forms of feudal suit and service.

And that the example thus set by the Norman court produced a favourable effect on the orders beneath, may be traced in the slight notices (would that they were more numerous!) which we meet with in the monkish chronicles.

From these we find, that as the name of the queen always follows that of the king in his grants,* so the name of the lady follows that of

* In most of William's charters the name of Matilda follows. One of the most curious of these will, however, be found in Wilkins' “*Concilia*,” where, after the decrees of an *ecclesiastical* court held at Windsor, the name of



her lord, in his grants of land to the monastery or church of which he is patron. And in imitation of the noble, the smaller class of freeholders followed the same form, and the half carrucate of land, or the two loads of firewood, or the right of "pannage" for the convent swine, is granted,—“Edith, my wife, assenting thereto,” even as the wife of the Conqueror, after the signature of her husband, adds, “I, Matilda the queen, have granted consent.”

And the high consideration and independence of the female part of the community is illustrated by the numerous gifts,—very frequently of land ; or advowsons of neighbouring churches, presented by them to the various religious establishments. In the curious and minute account, by Ingulphus, of their rebuilding Croyland abbey, one of the most honoured of the Saxon monasteries, we have a long list of benefactresses. The account is very characteristic.

William followed by that of Matilda appears, and then are subscribed the names of two archbishops, then of nearly all the bishops, and many of the abbots, but not a single secular person, save William and his queen.

On the feast of St. Perpetua and St. Felicitas, in 1114, the first foundations of the abbey church were laid. "And Joffrid Riddel offered stone for the work, also his wife the lady Geva, and her sister Avicia ; and Alan Croun, offered on the stone the patronage of the church of Freston ; and beside him on the next stone, the lady Muriel his wife, offered the patronage of Toftis ; and their son Maurice, and their daughter Matilda, offered the patronage of two other churches. Then the illustrious baron, Walter de Cantilupe, and his lady Emicina, offered on the two next stones, twenty marks ; and Theodoric de Bothby, and his lady, Lezilina, offered one toft and two acres of land. On the stone nearest the north-east, Simon the knight, and Gizilana his wife, offered the tithes of Morten and Scapewithe, and Reyner de Bothe, and his wife Goda, the tithes of Foule and Burton." And many others offered in the like manner ; and especial mention is made of Juliana, a very poor woman, who, unable to do more, gave a quantity of "thread for sewing the monks' garments."

It is pleasant to read, how with true Saxon hospitality the abbot feasted all the company.

The higher class, to the number of four hundred, dining in the refectory, while the lower classes, including all the workmen and their wives, dined in the cloisters and court-yard. Altogether, four thousand partook of the feast of Croyland abbey; and the chronicler concludes with the well-pleased remark, "that they were all right merry, the sun shining serenely, and the whole day passing without disturbance or even unpleasantness."*

The not less important, though more indirect advantages of Norman ascendancy—the rapid advancement of the towns and cities, placed immediately under the royal protection, or receiving their long list of Saxon rights and privileges, in regular exchange for a certain sum paid by them to the feudal lord; the freedom from foreign invasion, which from that period the land enjoyed, and the important influence of both on our rising trade and commerce,—must also not be overlooked in our estimate of this great revolution.

In this portion of our history, "we contemplate the spectacle of a barbarous people

* Gale, vol. ii. Cont. Croyland.




civilising themselves with unexampled rapidity, and then improving a nation, our own, that had in past times been more civilised than its teachers.”* The process was severe, but it was successful. Well-nigh crushed down by Norman power, Saxon energy at length aroused itself after a slumber of centuries, and now prepared to break the bonds which a more powerful foeman had imposed.

A less energetic race would have slumbered on in hopeless bondage, even as the nations of India have slumbered on through each successive conquest ; but the spirit that aroused Hengist, with his handful of men, to maintain a permanent settlement in England—that impelled Cerdic, year after year, and battle after battle, to hold on, until his conquest over the united British chieftains was achieved, still dwelt in the breast of the rude and degraded Saxon. And thus Norman luxury and refinement awakened Saxon improvement ; Norman scholarship aroused Saxon intellect ; and Norman prowess stimulated Saxon valour. The keen rivalry begun under the pressure of scorn and insult, gradually became a generous, an ennobling feel-

* Turner.

ing ; and the Saxon held on in the career so unwelcomely opened at first to him, until the Norman power, the Norman language, even the Norman name, became merged in the power, the language, and the prouder name of England.



CHAPTER VI.

Accession of Henry I.—Literary tastes of both his Queens —“ Good Queen Maude’s” Letters to St. Anselm, and to Pope Paschal—Turolde’s Life of her Mother, St. Margaret—St. Hildebert’s Correspondence and Poems—St. Hildebert’s Letter to Adelais—Marbodius—Philip de Than’s “Bestiarius,” Queen Adelais’ Handbook of Zoology — Gaimar’s “Estoire”—Trouvère David—“Voyage de St. Brandan”—Specimens—Beneficial Effects of the Patronage of Adelais—Constance la Gentil—Alice de Condé—Female Patronage of Norman Literature—Characteristics of this Branch—Introductions—Specimens—The “Salut.”

It was well, both for Saxon and Norman, that the twelfth century opened with the comparatively peaceful, and certainly prosperous, reign of the first Henry ; and it was of no slight importance to both, that his strongly expressed literary taste was shared by both his queens. To the first of these, the good Queen Maude, the cause of Latin literature owed much ; to the latter, “Aeliz la Bele,” as her poetical eulogists fondly term her, the lite-

rature of the Anglo-Norman school owes its earliest encouragement, indeed almost its origin.

The education of the good Queen Maude, and her probably original destination to the cloister, admirably fitted her in after-life to become the patroness of those bands of scholars whom the celebrity of the abbey of Bec had invited to Normandy, and whom the fame of the liberality of that monarch who bore the attractive title of Beauclerc subsequently invited to England. The mother of Maude was one who, at that period, might well be called a learned woman; and, as her earlier years were spent in the court of the Confessor, it is highly probable that to Queen Editha the future queen of Scotland owed her fitness for her high station. Queen Margaret distinguished herself soon after her marriage, by endeavouring to reconcile the differences that prevailed among her clergy; and it was, probably, the remembrance of the part that her mother acted in Scotland that induced Queen Maude to engage so actively, and on the part of Archbishop Anselm, when the great dispute between him and King Henry commenced.

We have had many specimens of noble and



royal correspondence ; but the name of the good Queen Maude has never been placed in the lists of royal letter-writers. Her correspondence with Archbishop Anselm excited, however, no little attention at the time, and ten of his letters addressed to her, and six addressed by her to him, will be found in the great folio collection of his works ;* together with her earnest and eloquent letter to Pope Paschal during the detention of Anselm at Rome. That Maude was strongly attached to this excellent man is evident from every sentence of these letters ; nor is it surprising, for Anselm seems to have possessed many amiable qualities,† and the unprotected orphan

* Anselmi Opera, Paris, 1720.

† The miracles which his affectionate biographer Eadmer relates of him exhibit, in many instances, his kindness of feeling, although we may well smile at their childishness. Anselm was riding one day, when a hare, closely pursued by the hounds, came up to him, and looked earnestly in his face ; the saint lifted his hand, and forbade the dogs to advance : " Go in peace," said he to the panting hare, " no one shall harm thee," and she bounded safely away. On another occasion, a little bird, pursued by a falcon, took refuge in his bosom, and St. Anselm carried it carefully home to the neighbouring convent. Such stories would never have been told of a

of Wilton abbey looked up to him for advice and guidance, even from the earliest proposal that Henry made to his advisers that she should share his crown. The letters which he wrote to his "dearest daughter" are, however, by no means so interesting as those which she addresses to him. Probably those which have been preserved are rather his official letters, while hers, with one exception, seem to have been the unstudied expression of her warm attachment to the religious instructor, who not only aided her unceasingly with his counsels, but who, as he remarks in one of them, "placed the marriage-ring upon her finger, and the queenly crown upon her head."

The first and most curious letter of Queen Maude had, for its object, the dissuading St. Anselm, from those frequent and severe fasts, which we learn, from his biographer, well-nigh irreparably injured his health.

She commences, "Maude, by grace of God queen of the Angles, to Anselm the archbishop, his most humble hand-maiden wisheth that, when the course of his life shall be hap-


harsh, or stern, however worthy man—these tales, therefore, often supply us with sure indications of character.

pily ended, he may attain unto the great end, even Christ." She first expresses her sorrow at hearing of the bad state of his health, especially at the weakness that has rendered him incapable of public speaking. "Do not, therefore, refuse, good and holy father, to be a speaker, through weakening your bodily strength by this unseasonable fasting. Tully in his book on old age saith, 'The gifts necessary to orators are not talents only, but health and strength.' Do not deceive yourself—just as spiritual food and drink is necessary for the soul, so is corporeal for the body. Therefore is it your duty to eat and drink, for there are great things for you by the appointment of God to do, in sowing, in weeding, in gathering into that garner of the Lord, where thief may not break in to steal—that great harvest.

"O! seest thou not the very, very few labourers in this the greatest field? Thou hast entered upon many labours, mayest thou bring a rich plenty away. Now, remember St. John the Evangelist, the beloved of the Lord, whom our Lord Himself willed to survive Him, that he might watch over His virgin mother. Thou hast taken the charge of our mother the Church,

which daily will fall into peril, unless thou, with great care, succour her. Our Lord Himself commends unto thee those brothers and sisters whom He hath redeemed with His own blood. Feed, therefore, O pastor of the Lord, His own sheep, nor let them starve for want of their food. After fasting Elijah was fed by the raven, Elisha by the widow, and Daniel by an angel. We all know that you have read of the self-denial of Pythagoras, of Socrates, of Antisthenes, and the other philosophers, but let us not refer to them.* In observing the grace of the new dispensation, we see Christ Jesus, who consecrated fasting, consecrated feasting also; going to the nuptial banquet, where he turned water into wine; seating himself at Simon's feast, where, having cast seven devils out of Mary Magdalene, He first fed her with spiritual food. And hear, O father,

* It would seem from this, that the more rigid friends of Anselm had probably vindicated his fasting by Pythagorean example; and we know, that a classical authority, even at this period, was considered next in importance to the fathers. It is, however, curious to find a queen four hundred years before Catherine Parr and Jane Grey, quoting Cicero, and making allusions to the ancient philosophers.



hear Paul saying to Timothy, 'Drink no longer water,'—may not this be said unto thee?"*

It is probable that the warm-hearted remonstrances of the queen produced their effect, although we have not Anselm's answer, for we find her subsequently urging on him the importance of his preaching, and expressing her delight at his sermons, and we know that his fame as a preacher was very great.

We have another letter addressed by her, when he had quitted England at the command of Henry; and it was doubtful whether he would return again, which breathes such a spirit of humble, almost abject, submission and broken-heartedness, as to be quite painful.† It is difficult to believe, unless Maude were the neglected and desolate wife, which Malmsbury represents her, and which other writers allude to, that the absence of her spiritual adviser could call forth such bitter sorrow.

In her subsequent letter to Pope Paschal, the same anxious and devoted feeling towards Anselm breaks forth; when she thanks him for the letters of exhortation sent to her husband,—a clear proof that her letter was private,

* Anselmi Opera, p. 387.

† Ibid. p. 394.

since Beauclerc was not likely to thank his wife for *her* thanks on such an occasion, and laments that "Anselm, our foster-father, the wisest comforter of the people, the most pious instructor," is still absent; and she prays, that "the tender lambs may not be longer deprived of their abundance of milk, the sheep of the fatness of their pastures, nor the shepherds of their rich provision, by the absence of the chief under-shepherd. For, in such a sorrow, I must bear a part; at such unquietness of the realm and such condemnable mockery, my wonder ceases not, but, overwhelmed with confusion, I fly to the blessed St. Peter and his apostolical vicar. O, do you cause us to rejoice in the return of our most beloved father Anselm, and we will yield due and sincere subjection to the apostolic chair. And for myself, instructed by your most valued and most wholesome admonitions, as far as my womanly powers may serve, I will strive, by the help of those approved men whom you shall employ, in all that I am able; so that your excellency having directed what my humility, in so far as it can, may perform, it may come to a happy end."*

* Anselmi Opera, p. 403.



How far the mediation of the good queen was successful we cannot ascertain, but soon after Henry became reconciled to his archbishop; an interview having taken place between them through the agency of his sister Adela, countess of Blois, the mother of Stephen, a lady who took a very important part in the ecclesiastical disputes of the day, and to whom St. Anselm addressed many letters, which prove the high estimation in which he held her.


The joy which Queen Maude felt at the return of her aged spiritual father was not destined to be of long continuance; Anselm, soon after, fell grievously ill—the consequence, said his friends, of the anxieties and fatigues he had undergone in his late contest with the king; and he died at Canterbury in 1107, scarcely three years after his restoration to the primacy, and just after having completed the magnificent choir of his cathedral.*

* The attachment of the Saxon clergy to Anselm was great; this partly arose from his fatherly kindness to Maude; but Eadmer mentions that, during the earlier years of Lanfranc's primacy, Anselm having been summoned as one of the first theologians of his day to take part in his council, when the question, how many Saxon saints (and they were very numerous) should be retained in the Anglo-Norman calendar, great opposition was made

No other ecclesiastic appears ever to have held that high station in Queen Maude's favour which St. Anselm did; to many others, however, she extended her patronage, and by many of them were her praises celebrated. The confessor of her mother, Queen Margaret, and probably Maude's earliest instructor, Turold, or Theodoric, as he entitles himself in the life of her mother, which he addressed to her, — appears to have been, for some time, a resident at her court, and was a friend of Archbishop Anselm. His life of Queen Margaret, which he wrote at Maude's especial request, was probably written later, as he terms himself in the dedication, "To the most excellently honourable, and most honourably excellent Maude, queen of the Angles, Theodoric, servant of the servants of St. Cuthbert," and wishes in the "present life the blessing of health and peace, and in the world to come the blessing of all blessings."

to St. Alphage, who had been martyred by the Danes. But Anselm vehemently advocated the cause of the Saxon saint. "He died," said he, "rather than aid in the ruin of his country; he was a true martyr, since he died for justice, even as St. John did for truth, and both of them equally for our Lord, who is both truth and right."

This little history abounds in curious details, and forcibly exhibits the valuable results of an intelligent female influence among a barbarous people. When Margaret summoned the Scottish clergy to meet the delegates from England, and the queen herself became the interpreter, the rude nobles, who would have scorned a king for thus interfering with "shaven priests," looked on in admiration of the lady, whose sweet voice, and whose winning smiles, they felt they themselves would have been unable to resist. And then, the splendid church furniture which she provided, and her books—genuine Saxon manuals,—blazing with gold, and displaying rainbow-like colours, and so richly adorned with gems, excited their utmost wonder; while Malcolm himself, though unable to read a syllable, "would often look at them, and turn over, and kiss and press his hand," on their gorgeous pages. And, true to her Saxon tastes, Queen Margaret caused her maidens to be taught broidery, and to them was committed the charge of "adorning the copes, and stoles, and chasubles, and altar-cloths;" and over these maidens the good queen watched sedulously. A pleasant episode



in a gloomy history—a bright gleam of sunshine athwart the dark clouds, is the tale of the gentle influence of St. Margaret of Scotland.*

The munificent patronage of Maude, we are told by Malmsbury, extended to numerous scholars; so much so, that they came in crowds from afar, and the most celebrated among them with songs, and copies of verses, “happy if they could delight the ears of the queen with a new poem.”† First among these must be placed Hildebert, a native of Brittany, and in after years the celebrated archbishop of Mans, a friend of Anselm, and who subsequently attained, like him, to the honours of canonisation. In the collection of his works we meet with two or three of his epistles to her; one apparently addressed soon after her marriage, but more faithful than complimentary. It contains, however, excellent advice, and useful warnings against pride in her high station: “Temporal good and fortune are the gifts of God. Thou hast not merited thy noble birth, or to be sprung from kings. Thou hast not laboured, yet

* *Vide* Pinkerton, *Vitæ Sanct.* † Malmsbury, p. 164.

art thou rich, and thy power raised so high, that above the heads of all the sons of men art thou placed. Thou couldst not gain beauty ; yet art thou beautiful in the eyes of the king. These are all the gifts of God—of the good God who giveth good things. But He is creditor unto thee for these, and for what He hath given will He require two-fold, but when He reckoneth, He will repay an hundred-fold. O blessed exchange ! in which there is no danger of wicked usury, nor will the paymaster in any way be distressed. O ! happy trade in which the creditor is welcomely importunate, and the debtor blessed by the increase of his debt.”*

But St. Hildebert was also one of the most distinguished Latin poets of his period, and he addressed several poems to his patroness Queen Maude. The first of these seems to have been written first before her marriage, and in it he celebrates her beauty, a characteristic on which other writers are silent. The next is on the occasion of her marriage, and is a gratulatory poem addressed to the king

* Hildeberti Opera.

and the nation. It is, perhaps, one of the best of his laudatory poems,—and as Hildebert is little known even by name to the general reader, although from his theological works many of our writers of the seventeenth century have borrowed largely, the following translation, as a specimen of laureate odes in the twelfth century, is offered :—


“England, thou fruitful land ! whom peace hath blest
With wealth, and ease, and every luxury ;—
Fair clime ! where neither biting frosts molest,
Nor scorching suns, but ever over thee,
The changing seasons fleet in soft variety.

When Nature, fostering mother, first surveyed
The earth, and various gifts to various lands
Divided ; she, from her all-bounteous hands
Scattered her choicest gifts on thee, and said,—

‘ Isle, be thou fruitful, rich, and blest with peace ;
Whatever pleasure seeks, or need implores,
Be thine ; and as thy wealth and power increase,
Send forth thy ships to sweep far distant shores.

Lo ! as my noblest gift in time to come
A king, of mighty father, mightier son,
Shall sway thy sceptre. He, the ways shall shun
Of evil men, the staff of justice he,
And in his time the Church shall quietly
Repose, and strictest law shall guard each home.

And therefore, as my crowning gift to thee
England, and him ;—behold the chosen bride ;—



Her virtues well ye know, and ancestry
Of purest race, for, since a double tide
Of royal blood is hers, the purple she
Fittest may share, and crimson pall—but see
A lovelier crimson e'er her cheek doth glow,
As at the altar, droopingly, she stands,
Sceptre in hand, and gem yecrowned brow,
Shedding soft light around—behold her now,
Spring blooming in her face, but loveliest,
Those unseen graces that adorn her breast,
The pledge of untold blessings. England thine
These gifts shall be—with joy these gifts receive,
For higher blessings are not mine to give.'” *

Hildebert survived the good Queen Maude, and lamented her death in a poem, in which he congratulated the world that her virtues and meekness survived in her daughter—a poetical prophecy, like most, unfulfilled. Henry of Huntingdon too, the chronicler, who had also enjoyed her patronage for his poems, wrote her epitaph, which may be seen in his works, but he celebrated, in far more poetical numbers, her successor, the fair Adelaïs of Louvain.

This second queen of Beauclerc became also the friend and correspondent of Hildebert; none of her letters are preserved, but

* Hildeberti Opera, p. 1367.

some of his, and some graceful poems in her celebration, will be found in his collected works. An extract from one of his letters to her on the subject of almsgiving may be inserted here as a favourable specimen of his abundant and very appropriate Scriptural quotations :—

“Do therefore what thou dost, O daughter of Christ, O! taught of God, for Him. Go on, even as thou hast gone on ; and be not forgetful of hospitality, for by it Abraham and Lot entertained angels. Nor forget thou the poor. Dorcas, who made clothing for widows, was raised from the dead at the prayer of Peter. Let no example of mercy be forgotten by thee. Peter and Andrew quitted their whole possessions ; Zaccheus gave half his goods to the poor ; and the two mites of the widow, and bread broken for the hungry, and the cup of cold water, are equally accepted, if offered with a willing mind. Stagnant water quickly breeds worms, so do riches ; pleasant is wealth in the use, worthless when lying idle, and it is displeasing to God, who, as the punishment of avarice, causeth it to produce iniquity.” He, therefore, exhorts the



fair queen to abound in almsgiving, ever remembering in her best deeds that "all things come from the mercy of God, without which we neither can will, nor do any good thing."*

In the verses addressed to Adelais, Hildebert celebrated her excellences; but in a very graceful poem of his brother prelate, Marbodus, bishop of Rennes, which is entitled merely, "To the queen of the Angles," but which, from internal evidence, is proved to belong to her,—her beauty is celebrated as beyond all parallel; the inadequacy of ornament to improve her loveliness is referred to, almost in the words used by Henry of Huntingdon, and her graceful and winning manners, her "honey-dropping words," (*melle fluentia verba*,) are dwelt upon with a delight, that proves the writer poured forth his own feelings, in weaving a chaplet of praise for the beautiful young queen.

It is not improbable that Adelais, previously to her marriage, had become acquainted with the two illustrious prelates of Mans and Rennes, Hildebert and Marbodus. Marbodus

* Hildeberti Opera, Letter xiv.

about this time had excited great attention among the scholars of France and Normandy by his work, professedly translated from the Arabic, on precious stones, and which gives a short description of each, with an account of its medicinal and occult virtues.* But there was a work, by an author whose name is lost to us, that excited even more attention than that of Marbodius. This was the "Bestiarius," a book which treated of birds, beasts, and fishes, and which gave an allegorical signification to each, and "spiritualised" each animal, too, in a most edifying manner.

It was this book that seems to have offered the first inducement to Philip de Than, to provide for the beautiful young queen an intellectual amusement in her vernacular tongue; and the native writer who had first signalised himself by versifying the doctrine of eclipses, the changes of the seasons, and the motions of the heavenly bodies, and which he dedicated to his uncle Humphrey de Than, who was chaplain to Hugh, the king's seneschal, now

* This, with his other works, will be found at the end of Hildebert's.

commenced a prouder, though scarcely a more poetical task, in the "Bestiarius," which he dedicated to the queen.

Although from the prosaic character of this work the writer could not take his place in the chapter on "the poet fathers of England," still in a work devoted to the progress of female society and education, the dull rhymes of Philip de Than must not be passed over without notice, for his "Bestiarius" was the first zoological manual, such as it was, ever presented to the notice of the high-born lady; and more, it was the first work in the Anglo-Norman tongue, that received the notice of royalty.

The work begins with a Latin epigraph. "Here begins the Bestiarius which Philip de Than made in praise and honour of the queen of England,* Adelais is her name;" and he goes on to state that it treats, first, of beasts; secondly, of birds; and lastly, of precious stones, and that they will also be allegorically considered. This is followed by the French title.

* This is the first instance I have found of "England" being substituted for "the English" or Angles.



“ Philip de Than, en franceise raisun,
Ad estrait le Bestiare, un livre de grammaire,
Our l'onur d'une gemme, ki mult est bele femme
Aliz e numée, Reine corronnée.”

By his terming the book a “*livre de grammaire*,” a right learned work is probably signified; and Philip de Than certainly takes care to advance a claim to no common learning, for in the next line but one he informs us that “Aliz,” the French name he gives the queen, “signifies in *Hebrew* the praise of God.”

His introduction being ended, he begins very properly with the lion, respecting whom,—his roaring, his lashing tail, and his sovereignty over all beasts—he expatiates with much satisfaction, informing us, in the spiritualisation which concludes it, that “this signifies the son of Mary.” There is little doubt but that the “*Bestiare*” presented to “*Aliz la bele*” was adorned with illuminations of the various animals, as the copies of the original “*Bestiarius*,” some of which yet remain, always are.* Indeed the copy, (believed to be

* The most splendid copy of this once admired work is in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. It is considered to belong to the close of this century. The pictures of the animals are “red and blue, touched with white; the

the only one existing, of the work now described,) has blank spaces between the descriptions, evidently intended for the illuminator to fill up, and after some of them the word, "*mustre ceste figure*," occurs. This is the case after the lion, and we must regret that we have not an imaginative portrait of the royal beast presented to us.


The next is the unicorn, "monoceros in Greek," says our learned author, but in French signifying "*un corn*:" and a wonderful creature is he, only to be captured by a maiden, "therefore hear you in what manner." When a man wishes to trap and take a unicorn, he goes to a forest, leading a young maiden, whom he leaves sitting down; to her presently the unicorn comes, and he lays his head on her breast, and falls so soundly asleep that he is taken without further trouble. This is an animal of such great value that it can only typify our Saviour; and not only on that ac-

coat of colour thick and shining, approaching the consistency of oil. The gold of the back-ground acknowledges no superiority in any ancient MS. and may almost set rivalry at defiance."—*Vide* Dibdin's "*Decameron*." The copy of "*Aliz la bele*" was doubtless similarly illuminated.

count, but because he loves the pure. But the next beast is as wonderful; this is the panther—a beautiful creature, of variegated colours, of sweet perfume, and very gentle. It is difficult to imagine what beast our forefathers had in view. This panther, when it has eaten sufficiently, retires to a cave, and there sleeps three days and three nights.

The antelope, “dorcus in Greek,” follows next; then the little bird, which goes down the crocodile’s throat, as our forefathers believed, and then the crocodile himself, “which signifies the devil,” and no wonder, for “he comes up from the depths of the Nile, and is a very vile beast. Four feet has he, and he is very fierce, and has great claws also.” His Satanic resemblance is therefore most satisfactorily made out.

The stag and the ant come next. On the last he enlarges very much, giving in rubric the remarks of King Solomon on her foresight and industry. He next describes the elephant, and a goodly space is left on the leaf for his picture, which, doubtless, in all the splendour of blue and gold, adorned the “presentation copy” of “*Aliz la bele.*” And a wonderful



creature is the elephant, carrying a castle on his back, and with only one joint in his legs, so that he can never lie down, but he leans against a tree. "So this is the way they catch him. They saw a tree almost through, and when the elephant leans against it, both fall together, and he is taken. He is largest in India, and he lives to the age of three hundred years."

And in this amusing, if not poetical way, does the worthy Philip de Than go on with accounts of about a dozen beasts. Then he begins his second part with the eagle. "A bird of beautiful example, for he looks steadily at the sun, when he is shining most clearly ; and this eagle, when he finds himself growing old, goes to a fountain, and bathes therein ; and thus, as saith Scripture, he reneweth his youth."

The phoenix comes next ; a bird of Araby, and most wonderful. Isidorus saith he lives five hundred years, and then he builds a funeral pile, lights it with a ray of the sun, and *de son gré* burns himself to powder, and then rises up, fresh and young again.

The pelican, and dove, and swan with her

dying melody, follow; and then begins the third part, the stones. Very few, however, are noticed. The account of the load-stone is curious, since he remarks its tendency to attract iron; but he does not seem to be aware of its polarity. "And this load-stone," says he, "typifies the cross of our Lord, which, by its hidden power, shall draw all the paynim unto it."

Such was the first zoological treatise composed in the vernacular tongue of Normandy, for the instruction of an English queen more than seven hundred years ago. As it only exists in manuscript,—probably in one only, and as it exhibits the opinions and belief of our forefathers respecting the wonders of the Eastern land, a more ample notice seemed necessary than of later and more easily accessible specimens.*

The success of Philip de Than's work pro-

* The copy is marked, Nero. A. V. Cotton Library. According to Mr. Turner, only portions are taken from the original "Bestiarius;" and even these are altered and amplified so as to be rather descriptions on the same plan than translations. Marbodius supplies the "gems," and Isidorus another portion.

bably induced many other scholars to provide Norman translations, or adaptations, of Latin works; and that Queen Adelais encouraged them, is proved by the number which soon after appeared.

Among them the work of Gaimar, on early British history, must take an important place, since it was, probably, the first vernacular history that familiarised the minds of the Normans with the tales of those shadowy heroes of ancient Britain, who had not long before been introduced to the notice of European scholars, through the medium of that long-admired book, Geoffrey of Monmouth's, "British History," and also of our Saxon monarchs.

But Gaimar did not choose merely to translate Geoffrey's Latin into courtly French, and tag his high-sounding periods in short couplets, but he set about writing a work, as he tells us in his very amusing conclusion, from various and original sources. He purchased French and *English*, as well as Latin books, on purpose that he might learn the whole truth; but he had never been able to have come to a conclusion, if the "Lady Constance

la Gentil" had not aided him right willingly. It was she who, while he was toiling through March and April (the *trouvères* are always particular in dates as well as in names), sent to Helmesley, to Sir Walter l'Espec (he who afterwards fought so bravely at the battle of the Standard), to borrow a precious volume, which had been lent to him by Earl Robert, of Gloucester, who had caused it to be translated "out of the Welsh books;" and this, which treated all about the British kings, Lady Constance la Gentil borrowed on purpose that Gaimar might read it:—

" For if she had not aided me,
Never might it finished be,"

says Gaimar, in conclusion ; and truly no slight thanks did he owe to the gracefully named " Constance la Gentil."

But even the details of this valuable book our *trouvère* did not take in trust. He read carefully over " the good book of Oxford," and which " belonged to Walter, the archdeacon," and by it

" I my work corrected well,
And besides, for truth I tell,


The history of Winchester
I read and sought with mickle care.
For Wassinburgh's rare English book
Whence many a goodly deed I took
Of each king and each emperor,
That reigned at Rome with great honore.
How each one reigned, how each his life
Led; and who peace loved, who loved strife.
All this, I pray you bear in mind,
Within this very book you'll find."

While, lest any one should be still so cruelly
unbelieving as to question this "full, true,
and particular account," he adds, with great
naïveté,—

"And he who still might doubtful be
May ask Nicol de Trailli,"—

An excellent authority, for Nicol de Trailli
was one of the barons of the exchequer, who
had married the daughter of the very Walter
l'Espec, and, therefore, was doubtless well
acquainted with, perhaps highly interested in,
Gaimar's work.

It is much to be regretted that the earlier
portion of this history is lost; that which re-
mains being only the part relating to the Saxon
kings; and it has been inserted in the manu-
script as a mere continuation of a subsequent



work, to which we shall ere long refer, the "Brût" of Maistre Wace.

What encouragement Adelais gave the writer, or whether he produced any more metrical histories, we cannot ascertain; but there was another *trouvère* at her court, one David, of whom nothing is known, save that Gaimar speaks of him as high in favour with the queen, and actually receiving assistance from her in a life of King Henry, which he was engaged upon. The Lady "Constance la Gentil," he tells us, also patronised his rival, and gave "a mark of silver, tried and weighed," to have his work fairly copied out, "in her chamber, where often she read it." A curious peculiarity of David's work is incidentally noticed by Gaimar; this is, that although it is spoken of as forming a large book, "*un livre grant*," it was intended to be sung or chanted; for the first verse, he tells us, "was noted for singing" (*le primer vers, noter par chant*). This, although a common custom with tolerably long pieces of poetry, even down to the fourteenth century, does not appear to have been the case with those works of higher pretension which were copied out in glossy vellum,

adorned with illuminations, and either read by the lady herself or her "*clerc lisant*."

One writer, the only one as yet deserving the name of poet, still remains, the unknown author of "the voyage of St. Brandan,"* a poem so graceful and so interesting, that even the reader of the present day might turn over its pages with equal delight to that felt by the fair queen when it was first presented to her. This work, as we learn from the opening address, was composed at the express request of the beautiful Adelais, "whose mild command," as the writer says,

"Hath won me
To turn this goodly historie
Into romanz, and carefully
To write it out and soothly tell
What to St. Brandan erst befell.
At thy command I undertake
The task right gladly: but will make

* Vespasian, B. X. Cotton Library. This is believed to be the only copy in existence. It was first noticed by the indefatigable Abbe de la Rue; and I feel no slight gratification in having been the first introducer of this poem to the English reader in my former production. The whole is, indeed, so excellent, that I have selected some additional passages for the present work, which, I doubt not, will gratify the reader.

No light and silly pleasantry,
Unfit in such grave work to be."

But although the work was grave, it was not to be dull: for the voyage of St. Brandan was a narrative of wild, and strange, and startling adventures of all the marvellous sights seen, and dangers encountered, by the holy abbot and his attendant monks, in their voyage to the terrestrial paradise. And all these varied incidents are narrated in verse so flowing, so spirited, and so *naïve*, that we can with difficulty imagine that the same era could produce the "*Bestiarius*" and this finished poem.

The voyage is indeed chequered with good and bad fortune:—the little barque of the holy men, one while mooring in a sheltered bay, and the passengers enjoying abundant and luxurious fare in an uninhabited castle; and then, casting anchor on a small island, which proves to be an enormous fish:—now listening to the heavenly song of the snowy birds of paradise,* now watching the fight of the two huge sea-serpents, and, ere their alarm has

* *Vide* "Historical Memoirs of the Queens of England," vol. i. p. 272.

ceased, becoming unwilling spectators of a yet fiercer fight between a " flaming griffin" and a dragon ; and a fearful "*beste*" is the griffin :—

" With crooked claws to seize I ween,
And flaming wings, and talons keen,
And o'er the ship he hovereth low,
And vainly may the strong wind blow,—
More swift is he ; than barque more strong,
And fierce he chaseth them along :
But, lo ! a dragon takes his flight,
With outstretched neck and wings of might,
A flaming dragon he, and grim,
And towards the griffin beareth him ;
And now the battle, furiously,
In mid air rageth fell to see ;
Sparks from their teeth fly swiftly round,
And blows, and flames ; and many a wound
Is given. The pilgrims anxiously
Look up, which shall victor be ?
The griffins huge, the dragon slight,
But far more lightsome for the flight.
And, lo ! the griffin in the sea
Falls dead. The dragon victory
Hath won ; and then they joyed outright,
And thanked the God of power and might."

And when, after numberless perils, visiting even the infernal regions, and seeing Judas, chained on a rock, exposed to the attacks of sea-monsters and of driving sleet and tempest,

they at length emerge and direct their course toward the East, the description of the terrestrial paradise is given with a force and gracefulness which few of the latter *trouvères* can at all attain to :—

" Full forty days o'er that high sea
With sloping course right speedily
The barque glides on, and now they come,
So Heaven hath ordered, to the gloom
That round encloseth Paradise,
Hiding it well from mortal eyes.
And heavily, and labouring slow,
Over that tideless sea they go ;
And now thick darkness all confounds them,
Wrapping them o'er ; and perils round them
So many are, that had not Heaven
In mercy timely succour given,
They ne'er had passed that cloud I trow."

But they surmounted them all, and,—

" Issuing from the darkness, see
With joyful hearts, right gratefully
Beyond the cloud that bright wall rise,
That round engirdleth Paradise."

A beautiful spot—

" The land all full
Of woods and rivers beautiful,
And meadows large, besprent with flowers,
And scented shrubs in fadeless bowers,



And trees with blossoms fair to see,
 And fruit also, deliciously
 Hung from the boughs ; nor briar, nor thorn,
 Thistle, nor blighted tree forlorn
 With blackened leaf, was there, for Spring
 Held aye a year-long blossoming.—
 And never shed their leaf the trees,
 Nor failed their fruit ; and still the breeze
 Blew soft, scent-laden from the fields.
 The earth gave honey, oozing through
 Its pores in sweet drops like the dew ;
 And in the mount was golden ore,
 And gems, and treasure, wondrous store.
 There the clear sun knew no declining,*
 Nor fog, nor mist, obscured his shining,
 No cloud across that sky did stray,
 Taking the sun's sweet light away ;
 No cutting blast, nor blighting air,
 For bitter winds blew never there ;
 Nor heat, nor frost, nor pain, nor grief,
 Nor hunger, thirst, for swift relief
 Was there, and of all good plentie."

And here the holy pilgrims rested until com-
 pelled to return, and then—

" They entered in the ship, and straight
 The signals made ; the wind blows free,
 The sails are spread, and o'er the sea

* " Sans fin illuist li clers soleil
 Ni veus noiez ni met en peril,
 Ni vient ni li nue del 'air
 Que del soleil tolget la clair ; —

They bound ; but swift and blithe I trow
 Their homeward course, for where was foe
 Of earth or hell 'gainst them to rise
 Who were returned from Paradise ?"

And thus safely they completed in three months their homeward voyage, although their outward had occupied seven years.

Such was the tale, full filled with marvels, which Adelais commanded the unknown *trouvère* to compose ; and, independently of its intrinsic merit, it claims especial notice as being the first narrative poem of the *langue d'oïl*. The voyage of St. Brandan first taught the writers in the vernacular tongue how pleasant a poem might be made of the adventures of one individual, instead of a lengthened catalogue of descriptions of animals, or a rhyming chronicle of kings. And even to the metrical chronicler this graceful poem suggested some improvements ; and in the best of these extant, composed certainly not many years after the "*Roman du Rou,*" of Wace, we discover an

Ni ci estrat mal ni aurat,
 Ni des mals veuz gei nei saurat
 Ni chalz, ni freis, ne de haite
 Ni faim, ne seïd, ne souffrait
 De tuz ses bons aurat plentie."



ease, a spirit, and a *naïve* simplicity in the narrative, that renders the story of the dukes of Normandy right pleasant reading.

And still, as the taste for poems in the Norman French spread among the higher classes, the ladies came forward as the chief encouragers and the chief rewarders of the *trouvère*. We have seen how eagerly "Constance la Gentil" interested herself in Gaimar's book; but she was not the only noble lady in the court of the literary Adelais who patronised the "learned clerk," and urged him to compose or translate new works; the Lady Alice de Condé of Horncastle, "*noble dame enseignee bel*," also distinguished herself in the same path, for she requested Sampson de Nanteuil, apparently an ecclesiastic, to translate the Proverbs of Solomon into French verse, accompanying them with a poetical gloss.

This, but unfinished, still remains,* presenting little that is interesting to the reader of the present day, but exhibiting a strong

* Harleian Col. No. 4388.—The closeness with which this writer translates the vulgate into the octo-syllabic French verse is remarkable. The work leaves off abruptly at the 22d chapter of Proverbs.

proof of the eagerness of the higher classes, especially the female portion, to obtain both religious and secular instruction. In his introduction, he tells us that he set about writing this work "for the honour of God, and at the instance of his lady, whom he loves and honours, and who many times prayed him to set about this treatise (*cet traité*), and the name of this lady is Alice de Condé, a noble lady, learned and beautiful, and who does not approve of flattery, and whose name is known to every one in the land."

It is probable that this fair Alice encouraged other *trouvères*, perhaps Wace himself, who speaks of rich gifts received from ladies. Indeed it was to the lady, rather than to the valiant and generous knight, that the poet in these early times, ere chivalry had a name and a law, turned and proffered his lowliest worship; and, not improbably, the peculiar characteristics of modern poetry, especially its grace and delicacy, may be attributed to that female taste, which so eagerly awakened, and cherished, and encouraged, its earliest efforts.

And to the circumstances under which these earliest works were composed, the

amusing peculiarities which mark the metrical tales of the subsequent centuries must be referred. Unlike the classical poet, who sets about his subject from the first in good earnest, and unlike the modern, who often works up an elaborate commencement, the *trouvère* begins with a full account of the sources from whence he derived his story ; often specifying, like Gaimar, the books that he read, and the kind friends who assisted his study, but always earnestly impressing on his readers or hearers that his information is the very best that could possibly be attained. Thus sings one, —


“Now listen, lordings, as ye wish Heaven’s benison on ye,
For I will sing a goodly lay of men of high degree,
Jongleurs, ’tis true, pretend to tell this tale, but
nought they know,
For much was altered, much was lost, a long, long
time ago ;
But blessings on a learned clerk, who sought it out
with care,
And wrote it out, aye, verse by verse, until this story
rare
Was saved complete, and then in book was straight-
way written fair.
And know ye where I found it ? ’T was in in an abbey
stored,
So well ye wot no lie is here, nor foolish deed, nor
word.”

In like manner, Hugh de Roteland, who wrote at the end of this century, begins his "Romaunt :"—

" Marvel strange it is, I trow,
That learned clerks, who mickle know
Of divers tongues, should ne'er have sought
This goodly history forth, and brought
It out to light, for soothly we
Have almost lost its memory.
And therefore ye who are unlearned
Know, that *from Latin* I have turned
This goodly story, that ye well
May understand it, and I'll tell
You, in ' romans,' what erst befell."

Surely the claims of a story translated from Latin, and so rare as to be unknown to "learned clerks who mickle know," must have been irresistible.

But there was a yet more irresistible method of beginning a poem, and that was by an address to the patron, or more frequently to the patroness under whose auspices the *trouvère* wrote ; and in this, the name, the style, and, as a point of course, the beauty and excellencies of the "*noble dame enseigne e bel*," were duly inserted. And thus the names of many a fair patroness of early poetry has been handed



down to us by being, as Maistre Wace says, "*mis en livre*" by the learned writer. Thus the author of the voyage of St. Brandan celebrates the "Lady Adelais the queen," and Gaimar, his kind patroness "Constance la Gentil;" and thus, in the following century, many a lady's name, long utterly forgotten, has been found enshrined in the fairly written volume that contains the lay or the romaunt, composed at her express request. And with hearty good-will does the writer appear to undertake this part of his subject, which was termed the "*Salut*," often rising to a height of graceful eloquence not to be found in the subsequent work. The following from an anonymous author, quoted by Abbé de la Rue, affords a specimen which could scarcely be improved by the poet of a far advanced period:—

"Heaven, who all sustains at will,
Guard my lady love from ill!
Keeping her aye in plenty, wealth,
In comfort, wisdom, peace, and health;
In all delight without alloy,
In mickle solace, mickle joy,
In good estate, from malice free,
From tongue of shameless villainie.
I bid thee hail my lady mine—
Praying all goodly gifts be thine;


That heaven and earth may still agree
To shower all fairest things on thee,
And aye thy pleasant path beset
With lily, rose, and violet."

The close of this century, even more than its beginning, was distinguished by a host of writers in the vernacular tongue of the higher classes. Every kind of subject was made a theme for the *trouvère*; among them, that subject which was ere long to supersede all the rest—the deeds of King Arthur and his knights. But the rise of chivalrous romance has so close a connexion with the rise and influence of chivalry, that the contemplation of this portion of the subject must be reserved for a future chapter. Meanwhile we shall proceed to notice the general state of female society, especially as connected with the conventual institutions, which, as the great sources of female education, demand a more specific notice than they have hitherto received.

CHAPTER . VII.

The Progress of Learning—New Conventual Establishments—The Female Convents—The Nun's Profession—Daily routine of the Convent Life—General Occupations of the Nun—The Female Conventual Officers—The Abbess—The Prioress—The Præcentrix—The Cellarress—The Chamberlain—The Kitchener—The Infirmaress—The other Officers—The Lay Sisters—The Scholars—The Convent School—The "Nun-Schoolmistress" of the 12th Century—The English Nun's Skill in Embroidery—Gold Work—Splendour and Beauty of the English Work—Story of the London Embroideress—Other Instruction in the Convent School—Concluding Remarks.


THE beneficial effects of the thirty-five years of peace enjoyed by the nation under the rule of the first Henry can scarcely be duly estimated, unless we also bear in mind that, short as that period appears to be, it was actually a longer interval than had been granted for many



centuries. And during this period, too, the nation was under the sway of a wise and most politic sovereign, who encouraged both literature and commerce, whose court was the most splendid of any in northern Europe, and whose palace was the resort of every illustrious scholar.

This period was remarkable for the number and variety of its religious foundations; and when we reflect upon the keenness of the newly awakened thirst for knowledge among the higher classes, and the numerous inducements and encouragements which the convent schools, as reformed by Lanfranc, held out to whoever sought to avail himself of their benefits, we may, perhaps, as correctly assign to the love of learning the foundation of many of these establishments as to a superstitious faith or a stricken conscience.

Nor, while so many noble abbeys, Reading, Cirencester, Rivaulx, Fountains, Leicester, and many more, were founded, was the cause of female education lost sight of. Numerous abbeys and priories for women were founded during the same period, among the chief of which may be named Godstow, Elstow, Sempring-



ham, Chicksand, Wroxhall,* Sopewell, and, in the immediate neighbourhood of London, the

* A pretty convent legend is told of the foundation of this abbey. Hugh, lord of Hatton, in Warwickshire, joined the Croises, and bidding farewell to his lady and children set forth for the Holy Land. Here he was taken captive—thrown into a dungeon, where he remained seven years. At length, one night musing on his hard fate, he remembered that St. Leonard was saint of his parish church; and probably hoping that saint would feel some sympathy in the sorrows of his parishioners, the good knight earnestly besought his aid. St. Leonard appeared, and, bidding him promise to found a house of nuns on the spot where he should meet his lady, told him to arise and go home. The command seemed strange enough to Sir Hugh, who was closely shut in a dungeon, and loaded with heavy chains; so he treated it as a dream, and again besought St. Leonard's aid. Again St. Leonard appeared, and gave the same command as before. The knight pronounced the vow to build the convent, and immediately found himself, although still wearing his fetters, in Wroxhall woods. Here a shepherd saw him—it was his own shepherd; but so changed was Sir Hugh by his long captivity that the shepherd knew him not. In answer to his request the shepherd called his lady, but when she came near she drew back in affright from the squalid and fettered stranger. At length Sir Hugh bethought himself of the gold ring which he and his lady had broken at their parting, and the half of which he had carefully kept. He drew it forth; the lady remembered the token, she took from her bosom the other piece, and

priories of Stratford,* Clerkenwell, and Holywell.

As the sources from whence all female education was derived during the middle ages, the convent schools demand particular notice in a work like this; and, as much misapprehension prevails respecting the situation, and the occupations and duties of the nun of the middle ages, we can scarcely do better than, previously to entering upon the second part of our view, take a survey of the routine of convent life, especially in connexion with its most important trust—the education of women.

While scarcely any particulars can be obtained of the routine of duties either, religious or secular in the Saxon convents, from the

now recognised her husband. The house for nuns was built on the very spot; and where the tree stood under which they had met, there was placed the high altar. When the inmates were assembled, a nun from Wilton was sent for, to teach them the rule, and Sir Hugh's daughter afterwards became the abbess.—*Vide Monasticon*, vol. v.

* Stratford seems to have been an eminent school for London young ladies. The Prioress Eglantine, according to Chaucer, spoke French, “after the schole of Stratford at Bowe,” and she was evidently a well-educated lady, although she spoke *London* French.

documents supplied by the Monasticon and writers who have also treated of this subject, we can obtain much information respecting these later foundations which, while it illustrates the immediate subject, throws also much incidental light on the domestic usages of this period.

The rule which was followed by the nuns of all the "regular" convents throughout the kingdom, and which was adhered to, with but slight alterations by the "Gilbertines," was that of St. Benedict, as amended and improved by Lanfranc. The general outline of this rule seems to have been well adapted to its purpose, and it was comparatively free from those severities of discipline which characterised the later rules. According to this, each day was to be passed in the alternation of religious services, with labour of various kinds both bodily and intellectual, relieved at intervals by suitable recreations; nor does the nun seem to have been doomed to that life of strict seclusion, which the conventual rules of modern times demand.

The age at which the nun of the Benedictine order made her profession has never been

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accurately ascertained; probably it varied at different periods and under different circumstances. Some writers have assigned as early an age as fourteen, while others, apparently with more correctness, have considered eighteen as the period.* That mere children were occasionally invested with the veil, the example of Mary, the youngest daughter of Edward I., and several other instances that may be added, fully prove.† But there is much reason to believe that these instances were contrary to rule; for when we remember how willingly Lanfranc and his council determined that full-grown women, who under the influence of fear of the consequences of a foreign invasion had taken the veil, should be absolved from their profession when the fear that had impelled them had passed away, we can scarcely believe that he would have allowed a mere child, unconscious of its import, to pronounce the irrevocable vow.

* Ancient councils forbade any profession of virginity until twenty-five; Alexander the Third allowed it at fourteen; and the Council of Trent determined the age to be sixteen.— *Vide Fosbrooke.*

† In these, and similar cases, the *parents* were rather to be blamed; for, although such instances occurred, they

After a novitiate which generally extended a year, and which was employed in learning the various religious duties of the convent, on some day of solemn festival,—of “our Ladye,” the Apostles, or Sunday, the novice, robed in white, bearing the habit of the order and an extinguished taper in her right hand, advanced to the altar, when the bishop had concluded the collect, and laid the habit at his feet. The bishop then blessed the vestments after a prescribed form, and gave them back to her, except the veil, saying, “Take, maiden, the robe which you shall wear in purity.” She then proceeded to the vestry, and having put them

seem never to have been encouraged by the Church. Indeed, Peter of Blois severely denounces those who compelled girls against their inclination to take the veil, and ecclesiastical councils echo his denunciations. The custom seems, however, to have been followed even in Saxon times, for we have seen King Oswy dedicate his infant daughter to the Church, when he placed her under the care of St. Hilda. But it is most unlikely that so excellent a woman should have allowed her infant charge to have taken a vow, the import of which she could not understand. It is, therefore, most probable, that Elfreda professed when she came to mature age, and that the vow of the nun was in Saxon times taken only by women capable of understanding and appreciating its import.

on, she returned with a lighted taper in her hand, singing, "I love Christ," &c. The Epistle, Gospel, and Creed (the Nicene), having been read, the bishop said, "Come, come, come, daughters, listen unto me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord," and the nun then came before the altar singing, "And now we follow with our whole hearts."

The bishop next knelt before the altar, and the nun knelt behind, while the Litany was sung by the choir, the bishop and priests meanwhile singing the seven penitential psalms. After the Litany, the bishop stood up and began joyfully (*festive*), the "*Veni, Creator.*" After this the nun arose, and standing before the altar, bowed her head, and the bishop then placed the veil. Then the nun sung "The Lord hath clothed me;" the "ban" was next pronounced by the bishop "against all who should disturb her holy purpose," and then the nun made her profession, signed it with the cross,* and laid it on the altar from whence the abbess took it to be preserved among the convent

* The custom which prevailed during the middle ages of placing a cross after the name, or as is more generally the case, in the *middle* of the name, has induced many

archives. The nun now stood before the altar, repeating thrice, "Receive me, O Lord, according to Thy word;" this was also repeated by the whole convent, and the *Gloria Patri*, *Kyrie eleeson*, and the Lord's Prayer, were said. Then followed the Psalms, "Lord, who shall inhabit," "The Lord is my Shepherd," "Save me, O Lord," to which all the choir responded, "And save Thine handmaiden." Lastly, the nun gave the lighted taper to another, and offered bread and wine to the bishop; she then resumed the taper, and, bowing, received the sacrament. The mass then concluded in the usual manner, and with the episcopal benediction, and the offering of the taper upon the altar, the whole service closed.*

The general order of the nun's daily occupation seems to have been as follows. About five o'clock in the morning, the nuns, if in

superficial writers to tell us that writing was a scarce accomplishment even among the clergy. The reader may, however, see the sign of the cross in the middle of every name appended to the charter of Battle abbey; that of the learned Lanfranc, as well as the rude barons.

* The foregoing account is from a MS. in the Cotton Library quoted by Fosbrooke.

the winter season,* each bearing a taper, proceeded to the church, and there performed the first of the daily services, "prime." After a short period devoted to meditation, they assembled to breakfast, and this seems to have consisted on fast-days of fish and water, on other days of meat and beer,—the usual breakfast of all classes during the middle ages. After this they went to their daily occupations, and *moderate* conversation on various subjects was allowed. At eight o'clock the bell summoned them to "tierce," the service which answers to the "morning-prayer" of the English church, and which was followed by "sexts," at which high mass was performed; and when the sermon, if there was any, was preached. These services lasted until nearly ten o'clock, and then the nuns proceeded to their refectory to dinner.

Their diet, judging from the minute direc-

* In the *time* appointed for each of the services, the arrangement of Milner is followed instead of Fosbrooke, as the former is unquestionably the most correct. It is not improbable, however, that some slight variations, especially in the time of the night-services, were made in different convents.

tions to the cellaress of Barking abbey, seems to have been good and various. In this very curious document, we find that she was to provide twenty-two good oxen for the convent, (to be salted down for the winter provision), as well as salt herrings and salmon; that she was to provide geese for Michaelmas-day; fowls and pig at various times; pork, and "white puddings with eggs, pepper, and saffron," for Advent; eels for Sheer Thursday, and pancakes for Shrove-tide. She was to make due provision of ale and wine, and give each nun ("ladye" she is called) her "liverage" of two pounds of almonds, five pounds of rice, one pound of figs, and one pound of raisins, each week during Lent. As all the Benedictine convents strictly followed the same rule, the duties of each cellaress were, doubtless, the same as those of her sister officer at Barking, and there is no reason to believe that the black-robed sisters ever, except on fast-days, sat down to "Lenten fare."

At the tables in the refectory the nuns sat in order, another table being placed at the end for the novices and pupils; the table for the superior of the convent, who was either abbess or prioress, was raised on a dais at the upper

end; but from the account of Barking abbey, it appears that the superior most frequently dined in her private room. On the ringing of a hand-bell, the dishes were brought in, and all the nuns stood while a short Latin grace was said—generally by the præcentrix. There were servants under the direction of the cellaress to bring whatever was wanted; and during the whole time, a nun read from a desk a portion of Scripture or some religious book. When dinner was concluded, the reader returned thanks, and the benediction having been given by the prioress, or, in her absence, by the sub-prioress or præcentrix, the nuns retired.

The period between after dinner and “nones” seems to have been devoted to recreation. Friends called about that time, and the nuns retired to the cloisters to converse, or walked in the garden.

The mid-day service, “nones,” was very short, and it does not seem that the nuns were obliged to assemble in church. Immediately after they took their “meridian,” a noontide slumber, which our forefathers, during the middle ages, always indulged in, and which

was absolutely necessary to the nuns, as their nightly rest was broken into by the midnight service. It was at this time that the younger nuns mostly endeavoured to meet their friends at the postern door, to enjoy a little secular conversation, and sometimes, through aid of the portress, they would steal out, to catch a furtive glance at the gaities of that world which they had professed to renounce. The injunction, therefore, of Dean Kentwode to the convent of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, in the fifteenth century, that "some sadde woman, and discrete, honeste, and wel named, for shutting the cloyster dores," should be appointed, was not unneedful.

How long the "meridian" was allowed, we cannot ascertain, nor the precise time of the "vespers," or "even-song." According to some writers, vespers were performed at three o'clock, P.M., while others give five o'clock as the time. The latter seems the more correct, inasmuch as the service itself, especially the hymns, refer to the "close of day," a phrase which might be applied to five o'clock, but certainly not to the earlier time. The nuns, too, are represented as exercising their various occupa-

tions in the cloister before even-song, but there would have been scarcely time, if three o'clock had summoned them to the service.

At five, therefore, the sisterhood again proceeded to the church, and on their return, on those days when supper was allowed, partook of a slight refreshment. Among the more devotional, or the more rigid, the interval between even-song and complin (the concluding service of the day) was devoted to reading and to meditation; and it was considered a mark of superior sanctity never to speak to any one.

At seven o'clock the bell summoned the nuns to the *completorium*, or complin,* when the emphatic benediction of "May the Lord grant you good rest and a *quiet* night," was pronounced; and after prayers and hymns, that supplicated protection from violent men, but more especially and earnestly protection from the powers of darkness, the service of the day closed.

Soon after this, the nuns retired to rest in their dormitory, or "dortour," where they slept until midnight. Then the chapel-bell

* *Vide* note at the end of this chapter.

again summoned them to the "*nocturnæ vigiliæ*," or "lauds,"* as they were more frequently called—a short but beautiful service, entirely made up of thanksgivings; and then they again retired to rest, until summoned by the bell for "prime."†

Such was the daily routine of the convent-


* *Vide* note at the end of this chapter.

† The danger of a mere spirit of formality being induced by the constant recurrence of these services seems to have been feared by many of the worthiest men of this period; and, therefore, many are their exhortations, that the recluse should not make her religious duties a mere lip service. "After tyme thou hast sayde dyvine service, thou shalt occupy thee (says Ailfred of Rievesby, as translated in the fifteenth century) wyth some honeste labor of thyne hondes, and be wel ware of multitude of psalmes in thy private prayer, and put it in noo certeyn, but as long as thou delitest ther inne, so longe use them. And when thou beginnest to waxe heavy of them or weary, then take a boke and read, or do some labor wyth thyne hondes. Thus shalt thou be occupied bitwene every divyne hour of the nyghte and the day, from the Kalends of November unto Lente; so, that a littel before complyn, thou be occupied with redyng of holy fathers instead of collacion, that thou myghtest, by grace, get some compunction of teres and fervor of devocion in saying thy complyn. And when thou art thus replete and fed with devocion, reste thee, and go to thy bedde."—Quoted by Fosbrooke.

ual life ; sometimes varied by fasts and longer vigils, but sometimes also relieved by splendid processions* and festivals ; and at Christmas and Easter, more especially by social observances, which rendered the convent the scene of mirth and rejoicing, no less than the abodes of the laity.

It is proper here to remark, that nuns, during the middle ages, were by no means so strictly immured as they are in the modern conventual establishments. They were allowed to receive visitors in the presence of another nun ; and on some occasions, "secular women" seem to have been allowed to sojourn for some time in the house. From the injunctions of the dean of St. Paul's, before referred to, we find that, in respect to this convent, St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, the nuns were accustomed to have visitors, and to entertain them with dancing, and other recreations ; this, however, was severely condemned. Nor was the nun strictly confined within the walls of her convent ; she was permitted to visit her parents, or her near

* These were within the convent bounds, and mostly through the cloisters, which, as the reader will see by ancient plans, always communicate with the church.



relations, for recreation,* or to attend them when sick, or to follow them to the grave.

* In the wardrobe accounts of Edward the Second, we find frequent mention of his sister, the nun at Ambresbury, visiting his court at the great festivals; and the Prioress Eglantine on her pilgrimage will be remembered by all readers of Chaucer.

The following legend of a recluse in Wroxhall Abbey seems also to prove that nuns had free egress and ingress on some occasions. There was a nun named Alice, and she wished greatly that a chapel in honour of our Ladye should be built. Our Ladye appeared to her and told her to begin it; at this she was much surprised, for she had no money. Again and again our Ladye appeared, and at length Alice told the prioress. The prioress asked her how much she possessed, and she answered fifteen pennies. Then said the prioress, "Though it be little, our Ladye may increase it full well." "Dame Alice" now prayed to know where she should build this chapel, and she was told on the north side of the church. It was now harvest-time, but early on the morrow, when she went there, she beheld snow lying just on the spot where the chapel was to be built, and there it lay until noon. Alice now summoned masons, and began to build; and every Saturday during the building, she knelt and prayed in the path leading through the church-yard, and always, when she arose from her knees, found in the path silver just enough to pay her workmen each week, and no more. The money was, doubtless, placed beside her by the good folk who came thither to prayers.

Notwithstanding these licenses occasionally given to the nuns, we have no authentic accounts of their free-

She was also allowed to quit the house if sick, for change of air, or "to make cures,"—an incidental remark, which proves how highly prized was the medical skill of the nun. Permission for those purposes was given her in the chapter, but if she required a longer time of absence, the bishop or superintendant of the convent was to be applied to, and he could give license for an indefinite period;* but, on

dom ever having been abused. Indeed, the records of the English convents prove them to have been the abodes of worthy and high-minded women. This is indirectly proved, too, by the character of Englishwomen during the middle ages, who, if they had been instructed by immoral teachers, must of necessity have displayed that immorality in their after conduct; but Wickliffe, Piers Ploughman, and Chaucer, although they severely denounce the monks and friars, pass little or no censure on the nuns. Piers Ploughman, indeed, represents Pride as prioress of a convent, and Vanity and Evil speaking among the inmates; but, even this sarcasm proves that these establishments were wholly free from suspicion of positive immorality. Chaucer, as is well known, makes his lady prioress one of the sweetest of his many beautiful female characters, and puts into her lips the most touching of his tales. Even the commissioners of Henry VIII., as we shall subsequently find, dared not to bring charges of immorality against the higher female convents, while against the more obscure, and consequently more unprotected, their charges are either vague or extravagant.

* Lyndwood, as quoted by Fosbrooke.



her journey, she was always to be accompanied by suitable attendants, and the abbess or prioress was escorted by her chaplain and attendant nuns.

The occupations of the nuns were various, but, perhaps, these can better be described in the course of our view of the different offices which constituted the conventual establishment.*

The Benedictine convent was a regular institution, consisting of a number of officers, each holding situations, the duties of which were strictly defined, and all these, as well as the monks or nuns, were under the rule of a superior. This, in abbeys, was the abbot or abbess; in priories, the prior or prioress. There does not appear to have been any difference in the authority of these in regard to the convent, but, politically considered, the abbot or abbess held a higher station; they were recognised as feudal tenants of the crown, and expected to furnish the requisite number of men-at-arms for the wars; they were allowed to hold "courts baron;" while, in some few instances, the power "of stocks, donjon, and

* In the following account of the officers, the order of Barking abbey has been observed.

gallows-tree," was also permitted them. We have no instance, however, of this last prerogative ever having been exercised by the lady abbess. The abbot was in procession distinguished by mitre and crosier, and the abbess also by a crosier,—indications of ecclesiastical rank not allowed to the prior or prioress.

The abbess of Barking, Shaftesbury, or other royal abbeys, was addressed by the king as his "dearly beloved cousin;" she was required to furnish a sufficient number of men for his foreign service; and as baroness, in right of her convent, took her seat on the bench of the county court; or in her own "court baron," summoned offenders before her, and passed sentence upon them. The prioress, if the establishment were only a priory, exercised in-door duties similar to the lady abbess, for the convent superior was enjoined to act as a mother towards every inmate. She was to preside in the chapter, keep a watchful eye upon the nuns, lay-sisters, and servants; to see that the "lettered nuns" were appointed to the more important offices, and she was to be well acquainted with the rule of the order, that she might instruct the no-

vices, or appoint suitable persons to do so.* She was to exercise unremitting care over the sick, the scholars, and especially over the nuns ; that they performed divine service suitably, received no improper visitors, and retired to rest at the regular hour.

In some convents the abbess was elected by the chapter of nuns, and the Monasticon furnishes us with more than one instance of a severely contested election ; in other cases, though they were probably few, the patron, or ecclesiastical authority, appointed the superior.

A solemn service was performed in the church at the induction of the new abbess or prioress ; and then, before the Gospel was read, the elected superior was led by the sub-prioress and chaplain of the house before the bishop of the diocese, and kneeling, answered his questions respecting the office she was about to take. The litany was then chanted, and at the

* "Also, you prioress to chuse one of your sustres, honeste, able, and conynge, of discretion, the whyche may have charge of techyng of your sustres that be unconynge (unlearned), for to teche hem her servyse, and the rule of her relygion."—Dean Kentwode's Instruction to the Nuns of St. Helen's.

conclusion she arose. The crosier was then placed in her hand and the convent ring upon her finger, and the religious service concluded with a hymn. But she had only received the *symbols* of office, and the express recognition of the nuns over whom she was to preside was considered necessary to her induction. She was, therefore, now led by the bishop to the chapter-house, seated in her stall, and the "book of the constitutions" having been laid on her lap, all the nuns, beginning with the sub-prioress, advanced in order, and each laying in turn her hand upon the opened book, said, "*In nomine Domini*, I sister—by-hote to ye, abbess (or prioress) of this convent, me for to keep obedience after the rule of St. Benedict;" and gave her the kiss of homage. The abbess then, in the true feudal form, taking each nun's hands between hers, replied, "And I admit thine obedience, *in nomine Domini*. Amen."*

In the more wealthy convents, the abbess seems to have had a suite of apartments appropriated to her sole use, and a separate table,

* From a MS. quoted by the Rev. W. L. Bowles, in his history of Lacock abbey.


to which noble, and sometimes royal guests, were admitted. She was also allowed a greater liberty of leaving the convent than was conceded to the nuns ; and she attended the king's "*cour plenière*," like any other baroness in her own right.

The next officer was the sub-prioress, and she, in the absence of the abbess or prioress, exercised their office. To her was assigned the charge of the needle-work, and she seems to have superintended the cutting out of the nun's dresses, which were given to tailors belonging to the house to make up ; for, it may be observed here, that "dress-making" was exclusively a male employment during the middle ages, and indeed, to comparatively modern times.* The sub-prioress was also to visit the infirmary diligently, and converse with the sick ; she also presided in chapter when the abbess and prioress were absent.

* The reader will probably remember that it is a tailor who brings the gown that excites the wrath of Petruchio so much in "Taming the Shrew ;" and in that curious record of London manners, in the reign of James the First, "Eastward Hoe," it is a tailor who has the charge of making the bridal dresses for Touchstone's vain and silly daughter.

The next officer was the præcentrix; she was emphatically to be a "*lettered nun*," for to her the keys of the book-case were consigned, and she also chose the book, and appointed the reader, during dinner; she also had charge of the singing-books; and, as her name implies, led the chanting. Most of the service appears to have been performed by the nuns, for it was a *family* service, and there is every reason to believe, that it was only at high mass that the chaplain was present. The nuns occupied their respective stalls in their church, which were opposite each other, and the service was chanted by alternate choirs, under the guidance of the præcentrix. The musical instruction of the nuns was under the superintendence of this officer, and, doubtless, from her the convent pupils received their lessons. As keeper of the library, it is probable, too, that on her devolved the more literary portion of their education.

The cellaress was next in order:—she was the general superintendent of the temporal affairs of the convent. And multifarious were her duties; for, not merely did the convent consist of nuns, lay-sisters, and domestic ser-




vants, but there were farm-servants—herdsmen, shepherds, swineherds, in some instances *vine-dressers*; and in the house were shoemakers and tailors, and many other workmen employed in those various occupations, for which, in the present day, we hire, but which, in the convent, as in the establishment of the noble, were then performed by regular servants. There were also numerous farms, at various distances from the convent; and it devolved on the cellaress to exercise vigilant superintendence over the bailiffs; there were also many estates belonging to the larger convents, and the letting them to suitable tenants, seeing that they were kept in proper order, receiving the rents, and keeping the accounts, were all parts of her duty. Her home duties, too, were numerous; and, judging from the minute rules for her conduct in the Monasticon,* she must have possessed great intelligence and activity. She

* *Vide* Monasticon, Barking abbey, vol. i. The good housewifery of the cellaresses seems to have excited the anger of some of their brother recluses; one writer, apparently of the fifteenth century, remarks, that such is the care of their flocks and herds, and such the vigilant superintendence of their granges, that “they schulde be callyd huswives, other thanne recluses.”

was to pay all bills ; make the necessary purchases for the diet of the convent,—from the “beef and pittance mutton,” to the figs and almonds ; she was to “be sure of pasture for her oxen in the time of yere ; and also to see that her hay be mowed and made in time, and see that all her houses wythin her office be suffisantly repayred ;” she was also “to loke what is owyng by dyverse fermours and rent-gaderers, and see that it be payde as soon as it maye ;” attend to “the issues of the larder,” providing every thing for the infirmary as well as the refectory ; and to exercise an unquestioned control over all the servants and lay-officers of the convent. In consequence of her duties being so numerous, she was permitted to be absent from many of the daily religious services ; and for the same reason, and from the nature of her duties, she was allowed greater license in conversing with strangers, and leaving the convent.

The chamberlain was the next officer ; little is said respecting her, but she appears to have been an elder nun, and had superintendence of the novices ; the arrangements respecting visitors seem to have devolved on her ; and the spinning



and weaving department too, as well as providing and washing the necessary apparel and bed furniture of the nuns and scholars, which, judging from the duties performed by the same officer in male convents, seem to have been assigned to her.

The kitchener was next; she had the general superintendence of the cooking, and probably from the circumstance of one of the superiors in a convent exercising this office, the celebrity of the nuns in cooking and confectionery arose,—a celebrity said yet to be retained in some of the Spanish and Portuguese nunneries. The freytoresses, who had a general charge of the sitting-rooms and eating-hall, are next; and then the infirmaress.

Her office, although ranking lower than others apparently inferior, was one of great importance; the infirmaress had the whole charge of the sick and convalescent, and on that account was allowed to be absent from worship if occasion required. She had a lay sister appointed especially to attend her, and she had a cook and a separate kitchener. She was to attend upon the sick and dying—not with medical aid alone, but with spiritual; and she heard confessions, and

gave "the peace" to them. It appears that nuns who possessed medical skill were accustomed to assist her; and that their skill was highly valued by our forefathers, and doubtless justly so, history, romance, and legend, alike bear testimony.

The next officer was the sacrist, and it was her duty to see that the church, and all the church ornaments, were properly attended to. She had to ring the bell at the given time, to light the lamp and the tapers, to be in attendance during service time, to receive the holy water from the priest for the nuns, and to carry the "pax-borde" round to the sisters. She, with requisite attendants, was also to cause the church to be prepared against the various festivals.

The nuns' church was generally solely appropriated to their use; but in the instance of some convents, though but few, the nuns occupy the northern half of the church, and the parishioners the southern; a wall dividing it, in which were slanted gratings which gave to the nuns a full view of the altar, while they were unseen by the laity. The church was, on occasions of high festivals, adorned with tapes-

try, often the work of the holy sisters, and the altar decked with rich altar-plate, the gifts, or bequests of those who had formerly attended the church ; and the tall standing cup, the silver candlestick, no longer assigned to a secular use, aided in casting additional splendour on the ceremonies of the Latin Church. According to the various festivals, the church was strewed with different materials ; "From the vigil of All Saints to the Nativity, let hay plentifully be strewed in the choir and round about ; on Advent Sunday, let sand be scattered ; on the holy Sabbath of Easter, strew ivy-leaves ; and on the four solemnities of Pentecost, St. John the Baptist, the Assumption, and St. Michael, let rushes be scattered throughout the choir."* All this was to be superintended by the sacrist, and to her was committed the charge of providing the tapers, and the care of all the altar-plate.

The other officers of the female convent were, the mistress of the novices, the parlouress, and the pensioneress ; to whom the superintendence of the daily convent dole, and the pay-


* Fosbrooke, from an old MS.

ment of the stated pensions to the poor, was assigned.

In addition to the nuns, a species of half nuns, called lay sisters, resided in the convent. These wore the habit of the order, but they were not subjected to so strict a rule; they seem to have been considered as a kind of upper servants, and were in more immediate attendance on the nuns than the other part of the household. They were not admitted until twenty years old, and their chief duties were, to wait on the sick, to lead the aged and blind, to assist in cooking, and brewing, and to weave.

All the convents that followed the Benedictine rule were bound to have a school; and to this part of their duty the nuns gave willing obedience. These convent schools were the great fountains from whence education was supplied to the female part of the population during the middle ages; and the notices which we can gather respecting the illustrious women of that period prove that the convent school well fulfilled its purpose.

That the school was viewed as a necessary adjunct to the female convent early in this cen-



tury, is proved from the remarks of Ailfred of Rievesby, who wrote near its close, in which he evidently considers the task of instruction as one of the most usual occupations of the nun; and although he seems to object to her thus employing her time, yet his remarks rather refer to the want of discipline, and probably the extreme youth of the children, than to convent instruction in general.

“There are some nuns,” says he, “who turn their cell into a school. She sits at the window, the child stands in the cloister; she looks earnestly at each of them, and while watching their play, now she is angry, now she laughs, now she threatens, now soothes, now spares, now kisses; now calls the weeping child to be beaten, and then strokes her face, and catching her round the neck eagerly caresses her, calling her ‘her little daughter and darling.’” This species of “infant-school,” the worthy writer probably considered beneath the dignity of the convent, but we may thank his graphic description for preserving to us so pleasing a picture of the nun of the middle ages.

Convents were, however, even to a late pe-

riod the abode of young children. The two young half brothers of Henry VI., Edmund and Jasper Tudor, were consigned to the care of the abbess of Barking; and the children of benefactors to these establishments were often, on the death of one or both their parents, placed beneath the protection of the lady abbess or prioress.

The regulations under which female scholars were admitted have not been handed down to us; it is questionable too, whether these schools were not in large towns *day-schools*. And while the higher classes received an education suitable to their rank, it appears that the middle classes were not neglected; a very old man having told Aubrey, that just previously to the dissolution of the monasteries, he had, when a boy, been accustomed to see the nuns of St. Mary, near Bridgewater, go out into one of the meadows belonging to the house, surrounded by their scholars, each with a distaff in hand.

It is probable, that as Lanfranc's rule directed all education to be gratuitous, the instruction provided in female convents was gratuitous also. It, however, appears, toward the later period, that money was paid for boarders; and we find, from Dean Kentwode's injunctions

to the nuns of St. Helen's, that some of them received *private* pupils; for he expressly says, "Also, we ordeyn that noon nun have, or receive noo chyl dren wyth them into y^e house forsayde, but yf (except that) y^e profit turne to y^e vayle of y^e same house."*

The nuns who did so, were most likely those who were highly distinguished in the various branches of convent education, and from whom, therefore, the parents of the scholars were anxious to obtain the advantages of a more exclusive attention than the general scholars received.

The regular convent school was most probably under the superintendence of the *præcentrix*, an officer whose duties, as we have seen, were of a more *literary* character than those of her sisters. As the keeper of the library, she must have been what is termed one of the "learned nuns," and from her the scholars probably received instruction in "grammar," which, in the phraseology of the middle ages, signified a knowledge of Latin. To her, doubtless, was also assigned the task of teaching music, — a science from the very earliest period

* *Monasticon*, vol. v.

assiduously cultivated in female convents; for the exquisite sweetness of the nuns' singing has been dwelt upon by many a middle-age writer.*

With her, as in the case in modern female convents, the nuns whose education and whose tastes fitted them for the office of teachers, seem to have been associated; and those, who, scarcely capable of imparting instruction in the more literary branches, were distinguished for their skill in the subordinate departments of education, taught, under her superintendence, those various works of skill or usefulness which,

* Nigel Wreker compares the nuns' singing to the voices of Sirens; and during this period many were induced to attend worship at the nuns' churches in order to hear their exquisite voices. The organ, from a very early period was used there, and a nun well skilled in music was appointed as organist, for the præcentrix always occupied her stall opposite the superior, and led the singing, just as the præcentor leads in the cathedral service. From a verbose description of the organ, given by St. Aldhelm, in his work before referred to, it appears, even in Saxon times, to have been similar to those in present use. His words literally translated are, "Listening to the greatest organs with a thousand blasts, the ear is soothed by the windy bellows, while the rest shines in gilt chests."

—De Laud. Mag. Bib. Patrum, vol. xiii. p. 3.

no less than "grammar" and music, formed the routine of the convent school.

Among these works of skill, the foremost place must be assigned to that art in which the English woman, especially the inmate of the convent, stood pre-eminent among every European nation,—the art of embroidery.

That fine needlework, even from the seventh century, was the favourite pursuit and boast of the Saxon lady, we have already seen. What the peculiar character of the work was, we cannot ascertain; nor, although the richest materials were employed, can we gain much information as to the manner in which these were wrought. The French term "*broiderie*," is a name given to *every* species of fine and ornamental needlework. Still the peculiar kind of work which in the present day bears the name was certainly known at a very early time; since the "gobble-stitch" sort of work which adorns the Bayeux tapestry could not by any sort of management have been used upon the thin lawn wimple, or the rich and fine silk mantle.

For the altar-cloth, when the material was not silk; for the hangings, either for the

church, or hall, or chamber, the coarse canvass, worked with the coarse worsted, and in the old original worsted stitch, might suit well; but for the finer fabric,—to be adorned with the delicate and expensive floss silk, or the yet more expensive gold and silver thread, and even, as we shall see, with pearls and gems,—a more delicate needle-work was required, and for these, the term “broiderie,” doubtless, means the same species of needlework as that which in the present day bears the name.

The exquisite work of Queen Editha has already been noticed; and the Conqueror’s chaplain relates how astonished were the Normans at the beautiful needlework that adorned the garments of the Saxon hostages. And the Conqueror’s wife, even in her will, records the superiority of English needlework, when, as one of her choicest bequests,—together with the precious “cups and their covers,” (doubtless the work of some London goldsmith, as eminent in his department as the embroideress in hers,) she leaves “the tunic worked at Winchester by Alderet’s wife, and the mantle embroidered with gold,” to her favourite foundation, the abbey of the Holy Trinity at Caen.

About that period gold embroidery, and borders wrought in gold, appear to have been in great estimation; probably the latter had been but just before introduced. We read of Canute having a right royal mantle of purple, worked with golden eagles, which, with the princely munificence which rendered him so popular with the Saxon clergy, he presented to the abbey of Ramsey. But the first notice we have of "*aurifrisii*," or "*orfrays*," — the gold work, so valued for many centuries by our forefathers, is in Domesday Book, where "Alvide the maiden" is represented as holding half a hide of land in Buckinghamshire, "which Godric the sheriff granted during his life, *that she might teach his daughter to make orfrays*,"* ("*Aurifrisium operari*."). The gift of between fifty and sixty acres of land for such instruction, proves emphatically how highly prized was this accomplishment, and how exclusively

* Introduction to Domesday Book, vol. i. p. 267.— In another entry, under "Wilts," a maiden named Leivede is mentioned as having made, in the time of King Edward, "*aurifrisium*" for the king and the queen. Sir H. Ellis thinks it probable that the same maiden may be meant, as the writers often transcribe proper names with great carelessness.

it was exercised by women of the higher classes.

In all these delicate and expensive works, the nuns took the lead ;* and toward the close of this century, when the abbot of St. Albans sent an especial deputation to Pope Adrian, who had been a scholar in that abbey-school,

* That the nuns so continually employed in such delicate occupations should have often wished to adorn themselves with their own fine needlework was very natural; and thus, even from Saxon times, we find multiplied exhortations of writers and decrees of councils directed against the anxiety of the convent maidens to adopt rich and ornamented apparel. St. Aldhelm, in his work, "*De Laudibus*," strives hard to prove how far lovelier, mentally considered, is the nun in her coarse dress and neglected hair, than the wife, with necklace, bracelets, and rings, and brodered garments, and "locks delicately curled with the iron." Many a council also decreed that the plain Benedictine dress of black serge should be strictly adhered to. One of the most curious of these decrees is that of the council of Oxford in 1222, in which, with a shameful want of gallantry, these churlish prelates state, "Because the female sex are less powerful against the wiles of the ancient enemy, it is ordained that the nuns do not wear silken wimples or mantles, neither dare to have needlework of gold or silver in their veils."

The monks, however, seem to have been quite as se-

to congratulate him on his elevation ; with various gifts of high value, he sent, as among the most valuable, a pair of sandals of matchless work, and three mitres of "unsurpassed beauty," the needlework of the Prioress Christina, of the priory at Markgate. It was, probably, from the same lady that Abbot Simon received those copes of splendid workmanship, on which Matthew Paris so delightedly dwells ; and the

ducible, "through the wiles of the ancient enemy," as their sisters, in this respect ; for the decree goes on to prohibit them from having "silken girdles, or any thing ornamented with gold or silver."—*Vide Wilkins' Concilia*, vol. i. an. 1222.

However submissive, although probably most reluctantly, the nuns may have been, we have testimony of council, chronicle, and satire, in subsequent times, that the monks, during the middle ages, were always transgressing in "vanity of apparel." Chaucer's lady prioress seems to have worn her appropriate dress,—arranged in the neatest and most becoming manner, it is true, the wimple finely plaited, and the cloak, "ful fetise ;" but his monk wears prohibited furs, and these, "the finest in the land," and the gold clasp made love-knot-wise to fasten his hood, for, "certainly, he was a fayre prelat." A later writer complains of the monks' extravagant love of gay apparel, and represents him with scarlet dress, and boots, so nicely fitted, that they are without a single wrinkle from the ankle to the knee.

hands of nuns doubtless wrought that priceless altar-cloth, which was one of the chief ornaments of the high altar.

And a pleasant and an honourable subsistence did these richer species of "broiderie" afford to the high-born, but not wealthy lady. "Sewing sylke worke in bowere," is represented in the earlier metrical romances as the constant employment of those heroines who, although daughters of kings, or wives of emperors, had, by peril of robbers, or of shipwreck, or through the freaks of faërie, been cast destitute among strangers.

And well fitted, not alone from its delicacy, but from its rich, even precious materials, was such work for the taper fingers of the high-born ladye, for gems were often wrought in the broidery, and pearls too. And thus the ancient romance tells of the gem-wrought mantle which "Emare" wore, when, in her rudderless boat,

" The lady floted forthe alone
Over the wyde see,"

and when she at length approached the shore, the lustre of that priceless pall so dazzled the

eyes of the spectators, that they cried, "certes she is of faerie."*

But noble ladies in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries emulated the romance in the splendour of their robes and mantles; and women of high, if not noble birth, at as early a period as this, gained a lucrative subsistence

* The minute description of this splendid piece of needlework, which the writer assures us was wrought by a fair paynim, "the amerayles dawghtyr," and occupied her seven long years, is curious. In each corner, he tells us, a pair of lovers were worked; Sir Amadas and Ydoine in one, and, as a matter of course, Sir Tristrem and the fair Iseult—those celebrated lovers—in another. These were adorned with precious stones, and as he speaks of the mantle glittering all over, we may suppose that the embroidery was in gold. The figures were portrayed with

"Stones bryghte of hewe
Wyth carbuncle, and sapphyre,
Kassadonys, and onyx so clere,
Sette in golde newe,
Diamondes, and rubyés
And other stones of mychyll pryse."

While Tristrem and Iseult,

"For as they loved ryghte
As full of stones are they dyghte
As thick as they maye be."

The lady who owns this mantle is an excellent worker

by "broiderie." So, doubtless, did that "noble matron in the city" (London), who, as Ailfred of Reivesby informs us, "was accustomed to adorn vestments of royal richness with gold, and to beautify them with gems, and figures, and foliage, in various-coloured needlework."

Now it was near the festival of holy King Edward, when a "most wealthy and noble lady, whom the Earl of Gloster had lately married, gave her a robe of no inferior value, for it was indeed such as the queen might wear,

of embroidery, although an emperor's daughter, and so diversified are her talents, that

" She couthe the werke al maner thyng
That fell to emperor or kyng,
Erle, baron or swayne."

Vide "Emare," in Ritson's Collection, vol. ii. p. 204.

Almost every article of dress, during this and the following centuries, was embroidered. The mantle principally, and most richly; this was often edged, too, with the "orfrays," as before alluded to. The veil was bordered with gold embroidery, and the neck and wristbands of the robe. The short vest of the nobleman was often richly worked, and his gloves, too, on the back of which jewels were inserted, as many a sepulchral remain proves. The copes of the clergy, indeed, all the church vestments, were also adorned with the most exquisite needlework.

to embroider for her, since," as the worthy monk *naïvely* says, "she was anxious, like all the other rich countesses throughout England, that her apparel should exceed the others in splendour." The embroideress, therefore, laboured daily, not only that the work should be beautifully finished, but that it should be ready at the time.

Meanwhile the feast of St. Edward came, "and this wise lady fluctuated greatly in mind, thinking of the indignation of this proudest of women at the delay of the work;" and yet she had some misgivings as to the propriety of continuing it on that day. "So turning to the young girl who assisted her, she said, 'Dost thou not observe it is the festival of holy King Edward? truly I consider working to be dangerous on this day.' But the young girl sneeringly replied, 'What! that Edward whom the rustic multitude venerate? I pray you what is he to me? let those who like it honour him with their psalm-singing, or mourn his death as they please.'"


The mistress, as the worthy writer informs us, naturally trembled at such fearful sayings. The girl, however, laughed on, until she fell

down in a fit, and foaming at the mouth. Eventually, as the reader may suppose, she was restored by miracle at the tomb of the king whom she had so abused.* The greater miracle in this case does not seem to have occurred to Ailfred of Rievesby,—it is, that a young girl should have preferred toiling at her broidery frame to the pleasures of a holy-day offered so willingly by her mistress.

While, judging from the illuminations of this period, we may well believe that when the fair embroideress attempted figures, she must have utterly failed, in flowers and foliage, especially when combined in arabesque patterns, her success, judging from the same specimens, was doubtless great; for patterns of elaborate beauty may often be found in the borders of the illuminated pages about the close of this century; and the same elegance may be perceived in the ornamental sculptures of the same period.

We have made a rather long digression from the convent school, but embroidery was so highly prized during the middle ages, and was so proud a boast of the convent maiden,

* Twysden, p. 410.



that more, perhaps, than any other female occupation, it required an enlarged notice here.

Although so skilful in "painting with the needle," we have no evidence that the nuns ever followed the sister art of illuminating. Writing was taught; and there is every reason to believe that it was a far more common accomplishment in the middle ages than has been generally considered. Not only do the romances and lays in Norman-French make frequent allusions to the lady writing letters, but the early English metrical romances — compositions, in most instances, of writers of a lower class, and consequently exhibiting a less refined state of manners, yet prove, that if ladies did make the sign of the cross in the middle of their name — and it is probable the convent maiden always did so — it was not from ignorance of letters, but from devotion.*

As writing materials were most expensive, we learn that children in the convent schools were taught to form their letters upon

* "And in token I sign it with the cross" is a common form, proving that the symbol was often used as a visible oath.

a board covered with a thin coating of wax. Upon this the learner wrote with a steel or iron pen ; and when the board was covered with writing it was held before the fire, which obliterated every letter, and the wax was then smoothed for a fresh copy.

In respect to the higher branches of education, but little information can be obtained. No elementary books of so early a period have been discovered ; but, doubtless, the same books that were used in the male convent schools were used in the female also ; and we have no reason to suppose that a different system of teaching prevailed. The list of classical authors known, even in Saxon times, as we find from the list which Alcuin has given of his books, was far from limited ; and that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries many additions had been made, the lists of books mentioned by various writers, and which Mr. Turner has quoted, amply shew.

The number of books in the libraries of the female convents differed, undoubtedly, according to the wealth, and, yet more, the character, of the institution. But although not equal to those in the male establishments

of Croyland and Glastonbury, it is doubtful whether Shaftesbury, and Ambresbury, and those other convents which were the dwelling-places of noble and royal women, might not have shewn a goodly collection of books—goodly in an age when penmanship alone was the means of circulating knowledge.

From the injunctions to the nuns of the Gilbertine order, we find that every “lettered nun” was expected to pass the time from prime to high mass in the cloister reading; but if she was without a book, work was assigned her. These books were Latin, because, until the close of the twelfth century, and indeed, much later, books in Norman-French consisted almost exclusively, as we have seen, of the entertaining class; and, therefore, although the nun might, perhaps, be allowed to read some of them for recreation, she evidently would not be permitted to read them in the cloister.

In the rules of the same order,* none of the nuns were to “write books without leave of the grand prior, or hire, and keep writers in their convents.”† Not improbably this

* The Gilbertine rule was founded in 1130.

† *Monasticon*, vol. v.

injunction arose from the circumstance of the fame of those very *trouvères*, whose works were noticed in the preceding chapter, having excited attention even in the cloister ; and while the poorer nuns would have gladly devoted their spare time to copying out some of the poems to which Queen Adelais had lent such willing attention, others, more wealthy, would right gladly, like “ Constance la Gentil,” have offered a “ mark of silver tried and weighed ” to the calligrapher who could fairly copy out in that glossy ink, that defies the changeful effects of seven centuries, and adorn with neat capitals of blue and vermillion, the volume that told, in her vernacular tongue, the history of the British kings, or that of the dukes of Normandy.

But Latin was the *native* language of the inmates of the cloister, for it was the tongue of their mother Church ; and we may well imagine almost the alarm, with which ecclesiastical councils viewed the rise and rapid progress of a vernacular literature. Still Anglo - Norman literature held on, though, doubtless, subordinate to the Latin, and advanced in public estimation ; until, even

after the original language of the people had resumed its pre-eminence, we find the convent school still teaching its pupils French, and the lady prioress Eglantine herself, with her prettiest lisp, using the still fashionable tongue.

Such was the routine of female conventual life during the middle ages, and although there may be much in the religious services of which we may conscientiously disapprove, there is much in the general system that merits commendation. Nor, although objections be advanced against the conventual system, can any exception be taken against the convent school. It was here that the importance of female education was first publicly recognised, and within these establishments, for the first time in the history of the world, was a regular provision made for the instruction of women.

Nor was this instruction, although originally commenced in a distant age, and amid a barbarous people, marked by any serious errors. It was not an education to render women mere creatures of accomplishments, still less was it an education to turn women into men ; but while the literary instruction was, (more espe-

cially in the Saxon convents) precisely the same as that in the monkish schools, female pursuits were never neglected; and never was the young scholar taught to look with contempt on the duties and occupations of women. She saw the lady abbess presiding in the chapter, and conducting a correspondence with the most learned men of her age, but she saw her also as the vigilant superintendant of her numerous household; and she saw the "lettered nun" laying aside her pen for the needle, perhaps for the distaff, and each inmate fulfilling her appropriated task.

The convent system of education, too, was a system of female instruction, conducted *wholly* by *female* teachers,—a most important point, and to which much of the delicacy and graceful dignity of woman in the middle ages may be traced. Imbibing all her instructions from female lips, the young scholar looked up admiringly and trustfully to her teacher, and learned to imitate the taste, the feeling, the perfect womanhood of her, from whom she received all the instruction that an advancing age could give.

Note to page 275.

The seven daily services of the Latin Church, as they were performed during the middle ages, are scarcely known to the general reader, while few, perhaps, have even heard the names of the two last of these services, complin and lauds. These are, however, worthy of a specific notice, not only on account of their general excellence, but from their affording such characteristic pictures of the fears of a superstitious, but devout age, at the approach and during the continuance of night.

The Complin service commences with the blessing so emphatic in troublous times, "May Almighty God grant us a good night and quiet rest;" and nearly all the psalms either supplicate protection from dangers of the night, or celebrate the praises of Him "who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth." These are, the 4th, "Hear me when I call;" the 31st, "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust;" the 91st, "He that dwelleth;" and the 134th, "Behold, bless ye the Lord." The first hymn, that prays "all nocturnal phantoms and vain and hurtful dreams may be chased away" follows; and then the versicle, "Thou art with us, O Lord, and Thy holy name hath been named upon us, forsake us not, O Lord our God." "Into Thine hands I commend my spirit," with the Doxology, is said thrice; and then follows the "*Nunc Dimittis*." A beautiful antiphon is next said, "Preserve us, O Lord, waking, and protect us sleeping, that we may watch with Christ, and rest in peace." "*Kyrie, eleeson!*" follows; and a short prayer, that "all snares of the enemy" may be removed, and that "the holy angels may keep, guard, and preserve us in peace." An antiphon of the

Virgin, which varies according to the church festivals, is next; and then the second hymn, which also varies with the season. The following is the hymn for Easter; it is copied, together with the order of service, from the "Sarum Missal," and translated into the same metre as the original:—

"Saviour of the world and Lord!
Of the highest One, the Word;
Light of light ineffable,
Swift guardian of thine Israel;—

Thou who every thing hast made,
Thou who grantest all thine aid,
Thou who rulest time and tide,
For the weary rest provide.

Thou who from afar hast sought us,
With thy precious blood hast bought us,
O guard us well—O set us free—
From him, our direst enemy!

Lo, in this joyful Paschaltide
We pray thee still our steps to guide;—
To watch us aye, O Lord, and well
Protect thy chosen Israel."

The Complin hymn for Lent is more beautiful, and supplicates still more earnestly protection from the powers of darkness. And it was natural; for not only was Paschaltide a joyful season, but, in the words of the old romance of Merlin,—

"The dayes are *clerer, and draweth longe*;"

and thus a soft twilight was around our forefathers when they exchanged the Complin hymn for Lent for the more joyful carol that welcomed Paschaltide; and ere this was exchanged for the Pentecost hymn, the service was sung by the pleasant light of the declining sun.

Far different was it when the subjoined hymn was sung. It was then "black Lent," the season of wind and snow, when thick clouds veiled the day, even before the early sunset. And by the dim light of the sepulchral lamp, and tapers that scarcely cast their faint gleam across the chancel, was the Complin hymn for Lent sung; and thus, with feelings, ever harmonising with the seasons, and which invest with poetry all the middle-age observances, it breathes a deeper and more earnest spirit of supplication, a more trustful and childlike confidence, than the former hymn; as though the belief that the powers of darkness were actually lying in wait in the gloom, served but to bid the child press closer to the fatherly arm that alone could protect him. The metre is the same as the original in the "Sarum Missal."

"Thou who art the day, the light,
Chase these gathering shades of night,
By thine all-pervading might,
Light of lights, we pray to thee!
Holiest Lord! amid the shade
Of thickest night put forth thine aid;
O, guard us while in sleep we're laid.
For peaceful rest we pray to thee!
By no horrid dreams molested,
By no snares of night infested,
Safe from *him*, our foe detested,
Saviour, may we rest in thee!

While our eyes in sleep are closing,
 May our hearts, on thee reposing,
 Find thine own right arm opposing
 Him, our deadliest enemy.

O ! safeguard of thine Israel !
 Whose watchful care no tongue may tell,
 Chase, chase these foemen fierce, and fell,
 Of thy blood-purchased family !

Since thou of frailest flesh hast made us,
 Wilt thou not in the conflict aid us ?—
 Yes ! safe we'll rest,—nought shall invade us,—
 Adesto nobis, Domine !"

Note to page 276.

The "*Nocturnæ Vigilæ*," or "Lauds," as the midnight service was irrespectively called, consisted entirely of thanksgivings. This was probably intended in accordance with the text, "At midnight will I rise and give thanks unto thee." In this service the 63d Psalm, "O God, thou art my God;" the 67th, "God be merciful unto us;" the 92d, "It is a good thing to give thanks;" the 98th, "O sing unto the Lord a new song;" the 148th, the 149th, and 150th, each celebrating the goodness of God, were sung, and it closed with the "*Benedicite*;"—a beautiful service, as an intelligent female friend remarks, "that summoned the sleepers to arise and give thanks to Him 'who never slumbereth or sleepeth,' and to hail the birth

of a new day by calling on 'all the works of the Lord' to bless Him and magnify Him for ever." The following is the first hymn ; it is translated from the " Sarum Missal " into the same metre as the original :—

" To watch and pray, while yet the night enfolds us, we'll
arise.

In psalms, and meditations sweet, and thoughts of Paradise,

And ceaseless praise unto the Lord, these silent hours be
past ;

The work of Heaven on sinful earth, until to us, at last,
The boon to enter into bliss may, through His grace, be
given,

And we around God's altar lead the blessed life of
Heaven."

The second hymn, at the conclusion of the service, is worthy of transcription. It is curious, too, for the corroboration it affords of the belief, during so many centuries so generally maintained, that all evil spirits and wandering ghosts flee away at cock-crowing. This hymn is considered to have been composed by Prudentius, and it is translated into the same metre as the original :—

" Eternal Ruler of the skies !

Alternate rise at thy behest

The day, with all its various ties—

The night, to give the weary rest.

Now crows the herald of the day—

Thus wakeful 'mid the shades of night ;

While yet the moon with gentle sway

Governs the wandering hosts of light.



At this blithe sound, away doth flee
The troop of hell, with shriek and start ;
At this, the erring company
Of ghostly shadows swift depart ;

At this, the mariner anew
Uprouseth him ; whilst ocean wild
Sinks peacefully—what could subdue
Peter, save this ? though thrice beguiled.

O ! therefore will I quickly rise—
The cock doth chide each slothful one ;
He bids each slumberer ope his eyes,
Each gainsayer the truth to own.

That joyful sound ! lo ! hope restored ;
Health seeks again the couch of pain ;
The stealthy robber dreads the sword ;—
And trembling faith revives again.

O Jesus ! on thy wanderers here
Look pityingly ;—that look alone
Will strengthen us ; or thou the tear
Canst give that breaks the heart of stone.

Effulgence pure ! our inmost powers
Illume, and chase these shades of night :
To thee, we yield our earliest hours,
And hymn thy praises ere the light."

The great beauty, and high devotional feeling of many of these ancient hymns, have not, as yet, been sufficiently appreciated ; nor has the literary antiquary paid sufficient attention to others of them, which afford such curious illus-

trations — as in the instance of the last — of the peculiar mixture of superstitious and religious feeling that characterised the middle ages. In another respect the hymns of the Latin church are deserving notice, inasmuch as they are the sources from whence modern Europe, and more especially England, has derived nearly every form of versification. But, perhaps, the most interesting light in which to contemplate these venerable remains will be as proofs, that amid all the errors and superstition of the period, there was much that was truly excellent: for many of the hymns of praise sung by our Saxon and Norman forefathers, may be echoed by Christians of every denomination in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER VIII.

Advancement of Literature—The Trouvère Herman—
Contests of Stephen and the Empress Maude—Reason
why London rejected her—Accession of Henry II.—
Elinor of Aquitaine — She patronises Wace and
the Troubadours—Troubadour Poetry—Its Charac-
teristics—Elinor's Influence on Cœur de Lion—Her
Regency—Noble Ladies of this Period—Petronilla,
Countess of Leicester—The Lady Roesia de Vere—
Female Wards—The Story of Gilbert de Plumpton—
Women of the Middle Classes—Of the Lower—Con-
clusion.

WITH the death of Beauclerc, the interval
of peace, which had been so beneficial to the
land, ended ; and a period of well-nigh twenty
years of civil war bade fair to reduce the people
to a state of barbarism. But the "encourage-
ment given to literature in England, from the
happy taste of Henry, his queens, his court, and
clergy, spread so widely the desire to attain it,



that even the stormy reign of Stephen seems to have been no impediment to its cultivation.”*

The court, however, was no longer the grand centre of literary attraction ; nor could Stephen (engaged in ceaseless war, alternately a conqueror and a captive), nor Maude of Boulogne, his devoted wife, become like their predecessors the patrons of literature. But a literary taste had been awakened ; and perhaps that taste was more widely diffused through the land by the very circumstances that confined each lady to her castle. It was during this period that “Constance la Gentil” gave the “mark of silver, tried and weighed,” to the transcriber of the life of Beauclerc ; and Alice de Condé patronised Sampson de Nanteuil ; and the “noble ladies,” too, of whom Maistre Wace makes mention, bestowed on him those goodly gifts “*beaus duns*,” for his earlier “*romans*,” which he *naïvely* laments he was unable to obtain from them at a more advanced period of his literary career.†

But although these trouvères who had al-

* Turner.

† *Vide* Introduction to the Second Part of his “*Roman du Rou.*”

ready become known to the English court, might receive continued patronage from the ladies who had originally encouraged them, and, perhaps, obtain a shelter in their castles from the storm that raged without,—such was the general confusion and distress, that the profession of the minstrel was soon abandoned for that of arms; nor until the accession of the first Plantagenet, do we find vernacular literature again flourishing.

In the short interval of comparative repose on the accession of Stephen, ere the Empress Maude came to contest the crown, we however find an Anglo-Norman trouvère, who deserves notice, for the spirit of gallantry with which he treated a subject, which the writers at the revival of letters would have made the vehicle of a bitter satire on women.

This trouvère was Guillaume Herman; he was patronised by Alexander, who was bishop of Lincoln from 1123 to 1147, and who gave him for a subject three words, “smoke, rain, and woman;” the three things, according to this churlish prelate, which effectually drive a man from his home. But Guillaume Herman determined not to speak ill of the ladies, those

munificent patronesses of the trouvère; so he "spiritualised" his subject, and represented heaven as the house, and pride as the smoke, covetousness as the rain, and luxury as the woman, each of whom endeavoured to drive man away.*


So courteous a trouvère deserved female patronage; and, therefore, we cannot be surprised to find that the Empress Maude, probably soon after her arrival in England, greatly encouraged him. She subsequently gave him, for the subject of another work, a history of those apocryphal personages—but not on that account less interesting to our legend-loving forefathers—"the Sybils:" and this, also, is in existence. His patroness, however, did not live to see its conclusion; for the work ends with an earnest prayer that the soul of the empress might enter paradise.†

* Abbé De la Rue's "*Histoire des Trouvères*," tom. ii. p. 274. It is curious to find this common proverb evidently in popular use full seven centuries ago; but the high antiquity of most of our popular sayings would surprise the general reader. Nearly all may be found in that old collection,—considered to be of as early a date as the close of this century, and called "*The Proverbs of Hendyng*."

† De la Rue, tom. ii. p. 284.

The reader has observed how gradually, from earlier Saxon times, queens had advanced in honour and dignity; and how, so far had Norman usages prevailed, that the coronation of the Conqueror's wife was celebrated with a splendour equal to his own. The same splendour marked the coronation of the two wives of Beauclerc, nor have we any reason to believe that the Saxon portion of the people felt disposed, like their forefathers, to murmur at the superior honours bestowed on the "ewen." But when, in 1127, Henry presented his daughter, then just returned from Germany, on the death of her husband the Emperor Henry V., to his assembled nobles, as his successor, "unless he should have a son," the oath of fealty was most reluctantly yielded; and the willingness with which that oath was violated when Stephen stood forth to claim the crown, proves that, although Saxon and Norman were content to behold a queen, crowned and sceptred, seated beside the king, they were not prepared to see her bearing those emblems of rule as queen in her own right.

Still, the objections of the nobles do not seem to have been founded on any abstract notion of



female mental inferiority ; nor does the warmest partisan of Stephen among the monkish chroniclers maintain his claims by any denunciation of "the monstrous regimen of women : " but the sole reason appears to have been, that which was maintained by the Saxons—the unfitness of a woman as the leader of an army.

It was the *military* talents of Stephen that rendered him, in the first instance, the choice of the people ; and when we learn that he possessed, in addition to these talents, most of the qualities likely to attract admiration ; that, according to Reginald of Durham, "he was the mildest being on the face of the earth, persevering in clemency, and always ready to pardon ;" we shall perceive that this unfortunate king approached very nearly in character to the knight of romance, and, as a natural consequence, ever possessed the attachment of the populace.

But the age was but partially civilised ; and the very qualities that rendered Stephen an object of general attachment, rendered him also inadequate to cope with those turbulent and refractory nobles, who required an iron sway ; and, strange as it may seem, the decisive

manifestation in favour of a *female* ruler, appears to have been hastened by the gentle, and perhaps, too indecisive measures of Stephen.

The praise of moderation or of gentleness cannot be conceded to the Empress Maude. She was a woman of commanding talents, but of inordinate pride, — although, it must be allowed, the early circumstances of her life afford great palliation of her conduct. But whatever were the feelings of the populace towards her, some of the haughtiest nobles submitted, apparently most willingly, to her sway; and when her gallant and devoted half-brother had taken Stephen prisoner, scarcely a voice throughout the southern counties was lifted up against her coronation.

But although the kingdom of Wessex received and acknowledged the Empress Maude as queen, when Henry of Blois crowned her in Winchester Cathedral, the rival kingdom of Mercia,* as represented by London and the

* The general reader will probably be surprised at this distinction; but it nevertheless subsisted down to the close of this reign, when the capital of the kingdom of Wessex was nearly destroyed by the Londoners, the representatives of the Mercian kingdom, and when the

adjacent country, refused to join in the recognition. It is true that Stephen had many claims on the affection of the Londoners; he had long dwelt among them—he married the daughter of that earl who had been their “custos” (for as yet lord-mayors were not), and that daughter was descended, on her mother’s side, from the genuine line of Saxon kings; but among the Mercians, even more strongly attached to popular election than the other Saxons, the great claim of Stephen to the crown was, that he had both an hereditary, and an elective right to it.


Among the Saxons, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, while they recognised hereditary right, they always viewed themselves as competent to set aside the next heir, if the next to him appeared more suitable. Thus, when the citizens of London assisted with

Treasury and the royal Mint were removed to the present capital. The peculiar privileges of London are considered by Sir F. Palgrave to be owing to the circumstance of its being the representative of the Mercian kingdom. It may also be added, that the red cross borne by the city is believed by many antiquaries to have been the arms of Mercia; and the code of laws, named the “Customs of London,” those of Offa, king of the Mercians.

loud acclamations at the coronation of Stephen in the abbey church of Westminster, they followed as nearly as they could the precedent which their fathers had given them in the election of Athelstan, when eight legitimate daughters had been passed over, that the crown might be bestowed on a male successor, although he was illegitimate.

It is most likely, therefore, that the determination of the inhabitants of London not to admit the empress, arose, not from indignation at the stern captivity in which she still held their favourite, Stephen, neither from the contemptuous scorn with which we learn she had treated them ; but solely because, true to their ancient customs, they would not agree to a woman possessing the supreme power.

And their opposition was successful ; for although the empress took up her residence in London, she was unable to obtain that recognition which the Conqueror hastened from the battle-field to obtain—the public acknowledgment of her as ruler, within the limits of the Mercian kingdom ; and ere long she was driven away by the partisans of the captive king.




Still, as we have before remarked, there was no contempt of woman in this rejection of the Empress Maude. None of the monkish historians, even while detailing the more repulsive points of her character, offer any sarcasm on female inferiority, or denounce, like many writers of the sixteenth century, all female rule as "unscriptural, and opposed unto reason." Nor did the rude warriors of these times refuse to listen to female counsels. Maude of Boulogne successfully mediated, in one instance, with her uncle, King David of Scotland, and his fierce nobles; and the Countess of Gloucester, who held Stephen in captivity during that of her husband, conducted a difficult negotiation with the barons of the opposite party, until the exchange of the king for the earl was effected. And many a lady, during these disastrous times, like Jeanne de Montfort, in that most delightful of all Froissart's delightful episodes, mounted the castle wall, and addressed words of kindness and encouragement to her little band of devoted retainers, and urged them to make good the defence, until the return of their absent, perhaps imprisoned lord;—

but the bold Amazon, cased in steel, advancing sword in hand to battle, is the mere fiction of a far later age.

At length the convention entered into between the Empress and Stephen, so soon followed by the deaths of the king and his eldest son, brought peace to the land. But those nineteen years of conflict, with all their bloodshed and sorrows, passed not away in vain. To this lawless period the extinction of actual bondage has been assigned, and some of the rigours of Norman rule were then mitigated; but the chief advantage was the impulse given to the popular mind.

In that rude state of society, civil war, distressing and injurious as it must ever be in detail, was in its general effects actually beneficial; for it aroused the national feeling, and through that the national mind. The most sluggish was compelled to act, the most indolent to decide, when dwellers in the same town, the same family, the same household, were summoned to the battle-field by contending claimants of the crown; and thus energies, which might have slumbered on in more prosperous times, undeveloped, because unaroused, sprang to



life amid the deadly struggles of civil contention ; and thus is that anomaly which many an historian has remarked, explained, that “ during this wasteful period of civil war, the Anglo-Norman mind was extensively educating itself.”

We may well imagine the joy with which the whole nation hailed the accession of our first Plantagenet. As hereditary duke of Normandy, he was welcomed by the Normans ; as descendant of Alfred and the Saxon kings, he was gladly recognised by the Saxons. And he was young, and valiant, and magnificent in his habits, and a patron of trouvères, and of learned men ; and the queen, who shared his throne, was the daughter of the first prince who ever cultivated the “ gay and joyous art,” —the art of song. And Elinor of Aquitaine patronised the poet too—both the race that had just come forth in the sunny south, the troubadours, and those who had sought an asylum at the Norman court, the poet-fathers of England.

One of these latter,—the first among them, had already enjoyed her patronage, and had already laid at her feet his first offering. But little could Elinor of Aquitaine, or Maistre



Robert Wace himself, imagine the mighty influence that work should exercise on the literature of England in after times ; for it first told in the language of the fair and noble, the tale of King Arthur.

The "*Brut d'Angleterre*," as this work of Robert Wace is entitled, is a free translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's "British History," a work that first appeared in 1125 in Latin, and which was asserted to have been translated by him from a manuscript which Walter Calenius, the archdeacon of Oxford, brought over from Bretagne. This "British History" told the deeds of our native kings for nearly two thousand years, and traced their genealogy up to no common source, to no barbarous tribe of aborigines, but to the "goddess-born Æneas."

And a pleasant book it must have been to the right learned reader ; and so eagerly was it sought after, that, ere five years were passed, Ailfred of Reivesby declares, that for a young scholar to acknowledge himself unacquainted with its contents, was the most effectual way to "write himself down" a dunce. How so long a period as at least five-and-twenty years should have elapsed ere a complete translation was made



into the Anglo-Norman is difficult to imagine; and that at length it should not have been made at the instance of some patron of *English* birth, is also strange. But it is to the fair heiress of Aquitaine, a stranger as yet to the land, that England owed, in 1155, the first translation of this far-famed history.

The work, as translated by Wace, is, like every other "translation" by his class, very *free*; for no trouvère chose to be cramped in his scope, even though professing to write a *veritable* history. He amplifies, in many instances, especially in those passages relating to King Arthur; but, compared with the later Arthurian romances, the "*Brut d'Angleterre*" is but wearisome reading, and we may almost imagine that the queen ere long turned not unwillingly to the more amusing, and more finished tales, also derived from a British source, of Chrestien de Troyes.

The subsequent and far more spirited work of Maistre Wace, his history of the dukes of Normandy, was written several years after, and he tells us it was at the request of King Henry. As he does not at all mention his earlier patroness, Elinor was most probably at this period

immured in the dungeon to which the licentious and ungrateful Plantagenet for so many years confined her.

Had it not been for the differences that so soon broke out between Henry and his "detested wife," as Benedict Abbas so feelingly terms her, the court of the second Henry and Elinor might almost have anticipated the splendours of the court of the third Edward and Philippa. But these differences appear to have commenced at an earlier period than has been generally supposed, and we have but few records of the monarch and his queen holding their joint court, and summoning around them the numerous company of nobles and ladies, and trouvères, and scholars, which graced the *cours plenières* of Beauclerc and the fair Adelais.

Still, until the period of her long captivity, we find Elinor the munificent patroness both of the troubadour and trouvère. She is said, nor is it unlikely, to have composed poems in the "*Langue d'oc*," the dialect of southern France, herself. None of her compositions have, however, been handed down to us; but many a troubadour has celebrated, in his

choicest numbers, the praises of the fair heiress of Aquitaine, the daughter of that princely minstrel who first cultivated the "joyous art," "the art of song."

These phrases, so current in troubadour poetry, serve well to designate its peculiarities. Unlike the early poetry of northern Europe, which bears the impress of strong and spontaneous feeling, and vivid imagination, amid all its rudeness,—the poetry of the *Langue d'oc* is distinguished by a careful elaboration of thought, a diction, remarkable indeed for its polish, but equally so for its artificial character, and, except in a few rare instances, by a laborious trifling, which proves the troubadour to have been any thing but in earnest.

Nor is this to be wondered at, when the peculiar character of the patronage bestowed on this favoured band of minstrels is considered. The troubadours, like the trouvères, sang for the fair and noble ; but, unlike the trouvères, who chose their own theme, or if, as in some few instances their theme was assigned them,—were left to their own choice as to the mode of treating it, the subject, the mode, and often the very metre, were appointed by the lady.

presidents of those fanciful but most artificial institutions, the courts of Love. These courts, too, were not merely establishments for the encouragement of poetry, but assemblies, where lengthened debates were held, and wire-drawn speeches in elaborate verse were pronounced, upon every question of lady-love,—most of them sufficiently frivolous, but some, deserving a far severer censure. To the troubadour who successfully maintained the debate, or who composed the most elaborate poem, the gift was, not the splendid mantle, the well-caparisoned palfrey, the marks of “silver tried and weighed,” the substantial gifts which rewarded his northern brethren, but graceful trifles, a chaplet of flowers, a crown of silver eglantine, or the celebrated golden violet, presented by the lady judges amid a series of fantastical solemnities.


In such a school a hundred professors of the “art of poetry” might be fostered, but not one single poet.* And thus we find that our

* This judgment may seem too severe; but if the reader will turn over the collection of troubadour poetry in the learned work of M. Raynouard, he will probably arrive at the same conclusion. There is much elegance in

more poetical forefathers were but slightly influenced by this, the great rival school ; and the effects of Elinor's patronage of the troubadours, if at all perceptible, are only to be traced in the higher polish, which the compositions of the trouvères of the following century exhibit.

From the higher classes, the troubadours probably received some encouragement ; and among the nobles of Poictou, who belonged to the English court, the names of more than one professor of the "gay art" may be found ; and foremost, one who acted no unimportant part in the reign of John, and was one of the great objects of popular hatred, Savary de Mauleon.

many of the specimens, but the similes, mostly commonplace, are wire-drawn beyond parallel,—except, perhaps, with that of the Della Cruscan school. It is a subject of congratulation to the Englishwoman, that the ladies of her native land never patronised the "fopperies and extravagancies," as Mr. Hallam well terms them, of the courts of Love. M. Raynouard, quoting from an ancient work, represents Elinor as having presided at one of these in 1174. This, however, could not be, for at that period she had just entered upon her long imprisonment. The Countess of Narbonne is therefore most probably answerable for the decisions which have been assigned to Elinor, and it is but just that she should have the very questionable credit of them.



The *English* nobles at this period, however, do not appear to have cultivated song or verse ; and the only native who takes his place in the band of troubadours, is the minstrel warrior Cœur de Lion.* It was from his gifted mother

* Some of Richard's poems are said to be still extant. That which he is believed to have composed during his captivity, and which is inserted in Mr. Sismondi's "*Littérature du Midi de l'Europe*," has every appearance of being genuine. It is interesting, not merely from the circumstances under which it was composed, but from the natural feeling, so rare in troubadour poetry, which it manifests. In the following I have given a close translation, and in the same metre as the original : —

“ Let the sad captive, who so long has pined,
 Withouten friend, to whom his sorrowful fears
 He might impart, solace his anxious mind
 With song. O therefore will I say, my peers,
 Tho' rich enow, too scant of gifts I find,
 For I've been two winters here.

And can ye bear, brave vassals, barons bold,
 Of England, Aquitaine, and Normandie,
 To have *this* said, yet grudgingly withhold
 The welcome ransom that would set me free ?
 I hint not treason, though for lack of gold
 I've been two winters here.

What, though no friend, no brother, proffer aid,
 Methinks ye might afford it. Am I not

that Richard, doubtless, derived his love of minstrelsy, and from her lips he received, in early boyhood, those tales of "that fair land over the seas," whither in early youth she had journeyed, which dwelt enduringly on his mind

Worthy a ransom ? Shall it ere be said
That Richard and his deeds are all forgot ?
My vassals, is my prowess thus repaid,
To be kept two winters here ?

No marvel if my heart be sorrowful,
For my fierce neighbour* o'er my pleasant lands
Will gladly rush, altho' before Heaven's king
A mutual oath we swore ; but holy bands
He scorns. I shall see many a bitter thing,
For I've been two winters here.


O let each valiant knight and bachelor
Know well, for *me*, would he uplift the brand,
He might perform good service—ay, far more
Than wealth. Brave knights, ha ! that on either hand
Of me ye were ; but chivalry is o'er,
For I've been two winters here.

Brethren in arms, whom I love—who love me,
Ye knights of Chau and Percheram, this lay
I've made, because, in drear captivity,
I pine to poise the lance. But sure the day
Will come when I shall pay them gallantly
For my stay two winters here."

* Philip Augustus.

through all the turbulent scenes of his earlier career, until at length his wish was fulfilled, and Palestine resounded for centuries with the fame of his exploits.

The warm attachment of that son to the mother, for whom he first took up arms, and who suffered so much for him, was gratefully displayed; when, as almost his first act on the death of his father, he raised her from prison to the head of the government, "giving commandment to the chief men of the kingdom, that all things should be disposed according to the will of the queen;" and to this command, the haughty nobles who had so often been in arms against Plantagenet seem to have submitted without question. This probably arose from her popularity, no less than from her wise government; for not only did Elinor continue regent during Richard's absence in Palestine, but during his subsequent captivity, and throughout a period of great popular excitement; for when, after a long struggle, Longchamp, bishop of Ely, was deposed from the justiciarship, Elinor still continued associated in the government with his successor, Walter, archbishop of Rouen. "She



appears to have been active on various important occasions, such as the measures required for the preservation of the king's peace. And certain pleas are recorded to have been held before her, and the archbishop as justiciar." * After Elinor returned from her successful embassy, undertaken to release her son from captivity, she appears to have resigned her office; and when the death of that favourite son soon after took place, she retired wholly from England.

The differences which subsisted for so many years between Henry and Elinor, and her subsequent long imprisonment, were, doubtless, the reasons why we meet with so very few notices of high-born ladies in the chronicles of this period. The "*noble dame, enseigne e bel,*" who in happier times might have graced the court, and thus become known to the historian, passed her days within the boundaries of her own domains; and, unless distinguished by her benefactions to the neighbouring convents, closed her life without record. But the high-born ladies of this period were not unconcerned spectators of public events. In the war of the

* *Vide* Introduction to "*Rotuli Curie Regis.*"



younger Henry in 1172, the ladies of the Earls of Norfolk and Leicester, the two chief leaders, are represented as taking an active interest in the cause, impelled, probably, by womanly sympathy for the wrongs of the queen.

The lady of the Earl of Leicester, Petronilla de Grantmesnil, held Leicester castle for some time against the king's forces, and, when at length compelled to relinquish it, she joined her husband who had landed in Suffolk with a band of mercenaries, but too late to prevent his possessions in Leicestershire from falling into the king's hands. She accompanied the earl in his toilsome progress through Suffolk, until they reached the territory of St. Edmund. Here, they were attacked by a large force, and, the ground being marshy, all were killed or taken prisoners. Among the latter were the earl and his lady, "who, being a woman of a lofty spirit," says the chronicler, "drew from her finger a ring in which was a gem of immense value, and flung it into the neighbouring stream, determined that her enemies should not be enriched with so valuable a spoil." *

* Matthew Paris.

The Earl and Countess were conveyed to Normandy, and placed in close captivity in the castle of Falaise, where they remained enduring great suffering for nearly three years. It was probably during this period, and to beguile her heavy hours, that the Countess Petronilla wove the curious braid, formed of her own hair, which she afterwards presented to the canons of Leicester abbey, to suspend a lamp in the choir. Some time in the year 1175, the Earl and his lady obtained their freedom by the surrender of their three important castles of Leicester, Mount Sorrel, and Groby; but eight years after, they were both again seized and imprisoned, nor, until a short time before Henry's death, do they appear to have obtained their release. On the death of her husband shortly after, the lady Petronilla, as countess in her own right, administered the affairs of her county. She died full of years and honours at her castle, and was honourably buried by the canons of Leicester in their abbey, she having a short time before built the great nave of the abbey church.

The story of another lady affords a curious illustration of the religious disputes of these

times ; and of the close seclusion in which a high-born woman ended her days.

The lady Roesia de Vere was the daughter of Alberic de Vere, first earl of Oxford, and was first married to Gilbert de Magnaville, the powerful but turbulent Earl of Essex, who, for the many atrocities committed by him and his brother-in-law, William de Saye, was very justly excommunicated by the Bishop of Ely, and whose violent death (he was thrown from his horse and fractured his skull) is pointed out by the chroniclers of this period as the vengeance of Heaven upon him for his many wicked deeds. Now this earl had in his better days founded a priory—a kind of hospital at Walden, at a place where four roads met, expressly for the benefit of wayfaring men, and it had been consecrated with much pomp by three bishops, in the presence of a numerous company, among whom was the lady Roesia; but unlike most ladies of that period, she gave nothing to the new foundation. This was sufficient to render her an object of hostility to the monks of Walden, but it was heightened, when, after her second marriage with Payan de Beauchamp, earl of Bedford, she joined with

him in founding a priory for Gilbertine canons at Newenham, and soon after, the splendid nunnery at Chicksand, in Bedfordshire, for nuns also of the Gilbertine order.*

The eldest son of her former marriage succeeded to his father's estates, and the prior of Walden made earnest suit to him yet farther to endow it; but the son, "having had his mind poisoned by that root of ancient evil, a woman," says the angry chronicler, so far from complying, complained bitterly of the alienation of so many estates from the family, and even hinted to the prior that he ought to be content "with a small church and inferior buildings." And no wonder that he said so, continues the chronicler, "for Roesia, the wife of the founder, used every effort to turn away the hearts of her sons, and her whole family, from *our* house, for the love that she bore to her foundation at Chicksand." A law-suit appears to have been the result; and, although the chronicler evidently feels vexed, he

* This establishment contained fifty-five canons, and a hundred and twenty nuns. The rule of St. Gilbert was much stricter than that of St. Benedict, and, as rival orders, each viewed the other with great hostility.

rejoices that “we retained all our possessions, except one great field at Edmonton.”

Such proceedings were not likely to conciliate either the lady Roesia or her son. Meanwhile Payan de Beauchamp died, and soon after the lady Roesia retired to Chicksand priory, although she did not take the veil. In 1167, her son Geoffrey, who was high in favour with the king, died at Chester, while preparing to set out on an expedition against the Welsh; and no sooner had he expired, than preparations were made by his attendants to convey the body to Walden.

“But a certain chaplain of the earl, named Hasculf, took horse quietly, and rode as though for his life—like a traitor as he was,” says the chronicler, “to Chicksand, to make known to the mother the death of her son.” Here he arrived before dawn, and when he had communicated the sad tidings to the lady Roesia, she summoned every one of her vassals whom she could call together at so short a notice, and directed them to mount and ride, and carry away “with strong hand” the body of her son. The flight of the chaplain, however, soon became known;—whither he had

gone was also easily divined, so the friends of the monks of Walden placed the bier on a litter, and surrounding it with knights well armed, and with swords ready drawn, conveyed the remains of the young earl of Essex from Chester to Walden, where the monks gladly received it.

The disappointed mother was probably unwilling to commence another lawsuit, and for the body of her son; but, by her express directions, no mortuary gifts were bestowed, "save one good war-steed with the armour, according to knightly usage," while "books, vestments, and precious vessels, worth three times as much, besides many other things, were carried away by the wary mother, who left us nothing at all." The angry chronicler shrewdly hints, in conclusion, that in all probability the best part of these would be found at Chicksand priory.*

* *Vide* Monasticon, vol. v. p. 141. The whole of this account, which seems evidently to have been written at the time, is very characteristic of the feuds and jealousies of these rival religious institutions. The great anxiety of the monks of Walden to possess the body of the younger earl, probably arose from the circumstance

The lady Roesia's second son now succeeded to the estates and title; and it must have afforded her no common delight, when, in 1177, he was appointed one of the leaders of the new crusade, and intrusted with the thousand marks of silver which the king sent to the Holy Land. The lady Roesia was, however, now far advanced in years, and although she did not take the veil, she spent much of her time at her favourite priory. She, however, sometimes resided on her manor of Newsels; and at the spot where two roads met she erected a cross, known for many centuries by the name of "the cross of lady Roese."

The date of her death is unknown, but early in the reign of Richard the First a well-endowed priory (founded by Eustace de Merke, and Ralph de Roucestre, to whom the lady Roesia had bequeathed her manor of Newsels) arose close beside the cross, from whence it received its name. In after years, numerous

of the founder not having been buried in *their* church, but by the Templars in the new Temple church, after sentence of excommunication had been reversed. This effigy may still be seen there with a *cowl* round the neck.

cottages clustered around the priory ; population increased, a grant for a market was obtained, and the scattered dwellings became a large and flourishing town, which recorded the name of her, who had founded the cross and priory, for it was "the lady Roesia's town."

Many centuries passed away. The cross was cast down—the priory became a heap of ruins—the very name of the lady Roesia de Vere had faded from the memories of the dwellers in Royston, when, just one hundred years ago, some workmen, digging in the market-place, discovered a cavity, where tradition reported that the old cross had stood. They dug farther ; and then a graceful circular chapel, about thirty feet high, and twenty feet in diameter, ornamented with carving in low-relief on the chalk walls, was brought to light, and a few mouldering female bones were found in an arched recess on the east. It was the hermitage whither the lady Roesia had retired from the world, and which she had chosen as her place of sepulture.*

* Dr. Stukeley, who in a very scarce tract gives a minute account of this discovery, endeavours with his usual fancifulness, to assign a name to each rude figure on

During the reigns of the earlier Anglo-Norman monarchs, the female nobility appear to have suffered from their rapacious exactions as severely as their brethren in rank. "The system of extortion prevailed to a degree which we should rather expect to find among Eastern slaves than that high-spirited race of Normandy, whose renown then filled Europe and Asia. The right of wardship was abused by selling the heir and his land to the highest bidder. That of marriage was carried to a still greater excess. The kings of France, indeed, claimed the prerogative of forbidding the marriage of their vassals' daughters to such persons as they thought unfriendly or dangerous to themselves; but in England, women, and even men, simply as tenants in chief, and not as wards, fined to the crown for leave to marry whom they would, or not to be compelled to marry any other." *

the walls, and to connect them with the incidents of lady Roesia's life. He also considers them to have been carved by the lady herself; but such work would have been far too laborious; besides, there is not a single instance during the middle ages of a *lady* using the chisel.

* Hallam's "Europe in the Middle Ages," vol. ii. p. 427.

And, doubtless, the records of Plantagenet's exchequer, which tell us how one fair lady fined both marks and palfreys, that she might remain unmarried for the next three years; and how William de Beaumont had to pay fifty marks, because, while the king intended him to marry the daughter of Ranulf, he chose to take Maurice de Barsham's daughter; doubtless, had these facts been recorded by the trouvère instead of the grave law-officer, we should have had many a romantic tale of true love surmounting all opposition. One story, which would form an admirable ballad, has been, however, related by an historian of this period, Benedict Abbas,—it is the story of Gilbert de Plumpton.

In the year 1184, while King Henry was in the city of Worcester, about to proceed on an expedition into Wales, the assizes were held, and among a number of prisoners brought thither for trial, was a youth of noble family in Yorkshire, by name Gilbert de Plumpton, and he was charged with theft and robbery, and with forcibly carrying off a maiden of large possessions, who was the daughter of Roger de Millevast, and a ward of the king. The

youth earnestly protested his innocence of all laid to his charge,* except carrying off the maiden, whom he had married; but Ranulph de Glanville, the king's chief justiciar, at whose behest he had been seized, bound with fetters, and conveyed to Worcester, was most urgent for his condemnation, since Glanville had already determined to marry the king's ward to a retainer of his own, Reyner, his steward. Nor did the chief justiciar disdain to persuade the jury to find the young man guilty; "and so it was done," is the simple statement of the chronicler, who was probably too well accustomed to such perversion of justice to feel much surprise.

Execution in those days followed quickly after the sentence; and in this case we may well believe that Glanville was anxious it should be so. Early on the following morning, therefore, Gilbert de Plumpton was led to the gibbet; but the youth, and high birth, and unmerited fate of the prisoner, awakened ge-

* The charge was, "that he broke in by night through *six* doors of her father's dwelling, and carried off one hunting horn, one headstall, beside other things, and the maiden."

neral sympathy. Now, just as he was led forth, his story was related to Baldwin, the bishop of Worcester, who sorrowed exceedingly when he heard it; whereupon his attendants prayed him vehemently to attempt the poor youth's rescue. "And they reminded him that he could legally do this, for it was *Sunday*, and it was the feast of blessed Mary Magdalene."

Then the bishop, who was a meek and a good man, assented. He mounted a horse, and swiftly rode after the executioners, who were leading the youth to the gallows-tree. "And when the bishop arrived there, already was the youth with his hands bound behind his back, with a green bandage over his eyes, an iron chain round his neck, and the executioners just ready to lift him up. Then the bishop, alighting from the horse, placed himself close beside the prisoner, and said, "'I forbid you on the part of God, and blessed Mary Magdalene, and under sentence of excommunication, to hang this man on this day, for to-day is the Lord's day, and the feast of Mary Magdalene; wherefore it is not lawful.' Then the executioners replied, 'Who are you? and

what madness prompts you to have the audacity to impede the king's justice?' But the bishop, with no less firmness of heart than speech, replied, 'Not madness, but heavenly pity urges me, nor do I desire to impede the king's justice, but to warn you of an unwary act, lest by violating a solemn day you and the king incur the wrath of an eternal God.'''* After more disputing, the bishop so far prevailed, that the youth was unbound, and placed in custody of the keeper of the king's castle, in order that the next day he might be led to execution.

But the story of Bishop Baldwin's bene-

* The insolence of the executioners will probably appear strange to the reader, accustomed to pictures of the overbearing conduct of the prelates of this period; but the history of Henry II.'s reign will supply many instances to prove that the ecclesiastical power was a very inadequate opponent of the regal. The benevolent Bishop Baldwin was the prelate who visited Wales in 1188, in company with Giraldus Cambrensis. We are indebted to Mr. Stapleton, the editor of the "Plumpton Correspondence," for those very interesting extracts from the Rolls, which complete Gilbert de Plumpton's romantic story.

volent exertions meanwhile flew far and wide. The kindness of the prelate, and the sympathy of the people, became known to the king ; and the "lion-faced" Plantagenet, who had but just recovered from the effects of his former quarrel with the clergy, thought it scarcely prudent, supported as the good Bishop Baldwin was by popular opinion, to risk another ; so he instantly countermanded the order for Gilbert de Plumpton's execution, and contented himself with merely directing that he should be kept in prison until farther inquiry.

Here the tale of the chronicler ends ; but to complete the poetical justice of this pleasant story, the Pipe Roll of Henry II. acquaints us that Gilbert de Plumpton was ere long liberated. In the first year of Richard I. we find Nigel de Plumpton represented as paying a hundred marks, that "his brother might have his wife and his lands ;" while another entry completes the story, for it states, that "Reyner, the steward of Ranulph de Glanville," was compelled to pay the enormous fine of one thousand marks, that he might obtain back his forfeited lands.

It were greatly to be wished that more of these characteristic stories had been recorded ; but the chroniclers of the 12th century, chiefly occupied in detailing the particulars of the civil wars of Stephen's reign, or the subsequent contests of Plantagenet with the ecclesiastical power, seldom turn aside from pursuing their narrative of public events to introduce those episodes, which often, far more than incidents connected with political history, illustrate the character and manners of the period. For this reason, we have scarcely a passing notice that could enable us to ascertain the condition, the occupations, or the habits of the female class immediately below the nobility. This class was, however, unquestionably small ; for during this unsettled period the number of inferior landholders was limited, and the wealthy traders in the cities, who, during the three following centuries rivalled the noble in wealth and splendour, had scarcely as yet appeared.

From the testimony of charters to religious establishments, and from a few passing notices, we, however, find the women of this class very frequently in possession of independent property—often of land, and bestowing it freely on

religious establishments;* but it is not until the following century that we can gain much specific information respecting them.

Respecting women of the middle class, not only the records of the religious establishments, but entries in the rolls,—that of the 31st of Henry I., those of Henry II., and the most interesting of all, the “Rolls of the King’s Court,” which illustrate a period extending from the sixth year of Richard to the first of John, afford us sufficient information to prove that women of the middle classes in the 12th century enjoyed a degree of consideration fully equal, in some respects superior, to that enjoyed by the same class in modern times. On turning to the index of names of persons subjoined to the above-mentioned records, the reader will be surprised at the number of

* The charters of the various religious establishments of this period afford abundant illustration of this. Those of Clerkenwell nunnery, founded at the beginning of this century, present many female names; so do those of the female priory of Holywell, and several other London convents prove, in the number of their benefactresses, the wealth and independent possessions of the wives and daughters of its early inhabitants.

female names to be found there ; and as these are always connected with law proceedings—mostly too in *civil* cases, it proves that they were in fuller possession of independent property, and, probably, more actively engaged in trade, than even in the present day.

In the earliest of these records, the Pipe Roll of Henry I., we find many women paying fines for license to receive their dower, or their father's debts, or money due to them from some specified debtor. In some instances, however, they pay for violation of the laws ;* and in that generally prevailing crime of the period, falsification of the coinage, the ladies, we are compelled to acknowledge, sometimes participated. The cutting and neatly trimming the thin silver pennies, which at this period formed the circulating medium of the whole community, was, indeed, a nice task for female fingers,

* There is an entry in this curious Roll which represents "Haldena, the daughter of Selle," as having been fined "ten marks for peace broken." It would be amusing to ascertain the precise character of this quarrel. Perhaps, a Saxon, as her name and that of her father prove her to have been, she fiercely and patriotically attacked some proud Norman dame, who "put her in court" for the offence.

and it may be feared that in the "clippings" of Henry I.'s reign some of them took too active a part.

From the same curious roll, which supplies some valuable information respecting the Jews, we find that Jewish *women* were sometimes engaged in trade; and in one instance the wife appears associated with her husband in the payment of a large sum.* Jewish women also followed the profession of money-lenders during this century; for in the curious narrative of Richard De Anesty, written about 1163-4, he relates how, in his expensive pursuit of justice, he borrowed "four pounds ten of Comitissa the Jewess of Cambridge;"† and

* "Jacob the Jew, and his wife, pay sixty marks of silver (about equal to 800*l.*) on account of the plea that was between them and the men of the abbey of Westminster." This payment was most probably a sort of bribe, to expedite justice, which at this period, unless hastened by similar means, was more than proverbially slow.

† Comitissa appears to have been wealthy, for there is an entry in Madox's Exchequer of a fine of seven gold marks (nearly equal to 900*l.*) paid by her and her sons, for one of them having married without the king's license. The very curious narrative of De Anesty will be found in the second volume of Sir F. Palgrave's "English Commonwealth," Appendix.

afterwards another sum of "Mirabella the Jewess of Newport;" for which these ladies charged the enormous interest of "*four pennies a-week*" for each pound.

We can scarcely be surprised that a trade which realised such enormous profits should excite the emulation of Christians, and that they should seek to share in its gains. We have, however, few instances of Christian money-lenders until after the expulsion of the Jews; but the introduction to the "Rolls of the King's Court," makes us acquainted from a contemporary document, with the singular fact of a Christian *female* money-lender. This is a person bearing the genuine Saxon name, Goda, a resident in London, and occupying a tenement in "Fridaistrete."*

* As the name and profession, "*Godá feneratrice*," are only incidentally mentioned, together with other names in the document, we can ascertain nothing respecting this lady's standing in society. That she was not a Jewess is proved, not only by the name, but the residence, for the Jews were confined to two distinct localities, the Old Jewry, and that part now called Jewry Street. From the sum she pays for her residence, she must have occupied a handsome dwelling, for William Le Blunde mentioned as her neighbour, and who was sheriff soon after, pays a lower rent for his.

Other trades, and of a more feminine character, were also pursued by the female inhabitants of the towns and cities. The embroideress, as we have seen in a former chapter, followed a most lucrative employment; and from an incidental notice in Madox, we find that the *London* embroideress still maintained her pre-eminence. This is an entry, stating that the sheriffs of London, in the fifth year of Henry II., accounted at the exchequer, among other disbursements, for "fourscore pounds for an embroidered robe for the queen."* Thus the splendid and haughty Elinor of Aquitaine, well accustomed both to the gorgeous produce of the Sicilian looms, and the rich and delicate "fine needlework" of the Saracen maidens, chose the embroideress of Saxon London to adorn the robe, that

* Were it not that from other sources we learn how expensive were the work and the materials of these royal dresses, we might suspect an error, for the cost is equal to *fourteen hundred pounds*, present money! This was doubtless, therefore, "beautified with gold and pearls, and adorned with gems." There is a farther entry, stating that for the mere charge of conveying it to the queen, then probably in Normandy, a sum equal to 18*l.* or 20*l.* was incurred; another proof of its great beauty and value.

in its value reminds us of tales of *faërie*, where the lady is represented as wearing in one garment the cost of a whole manor.

The workers in gold and silver thread, and bullion,—the makers of “*orfrays*,” were probably, at this period, numerous; for these expensive ornaments decorated the dress both of the knight and lady, as well as the coverings of the shrine and altar. Weaving was also extensively pursued by women; and from an ecclesiastical decree forbidding nuns to make purses, except “of white leather, and unornamented with gold or silk,” the making of these (which were hung at the girdle) and of gloves also, which were richly worked, and often set with gems on the back of the hand, probably supplied others with employment.

Of those females of the middle class who were not engaged in trade, our notices are very slight. The specific details of domestic economy were not likely to interest the monkish chronicler; nor have the tales which amused the popular mind, and which are always true to the habits, the feelings, and the very costume of the day, been handed down to us. Nor was it until the following

century that those curious and amusing legends were composed, which, from the minuteness with which they rebuke the besetting sins of women during the middle ages, supply us with so many a graphic trait of society and manners.

Even more scanty is our information respecting women of the lower class. These are seldom alluded to ; but the entries in the " Boulden Book " exhibit, as we have seen, the general respect paid to the " housewife." From passing remarks in the chronicles of this period, we find, too, that among the lower class, women were the general medical advisers,—at least of those whose distance from the convent prevented their obtaining that advice which the nun, and the lady abbess herself, were always ready to afford. In too many instances, however, these women professed to cure by the more questionable agency of charms and spells ; and we find that, down to even a later period, the potent " Runic rhyme " was still muttered by many a village crone, while her list of remedies boasted a far higher antiquity than those of the convent infirmary,—since the vervain of classical cele-

brity, and the rue and mistletoe of Druidical use, were numbered among them.

The power of foretelling future events was frequently claimed by these women; and therefore the Bishop of Exeter, near the close of this century, specifically denounced all who, from the appearance of the new moon, or from herbs, or trees, or fountains (how truly Celtic are all these modes of divination!), should pretend to foretell things to come.* Episcopal prohibitions, however, seem to have been unheeded, and from these early times to the present day, the village maiden has still sought, from the same source, forbidden knowledge.

Little can be known, too, of the village maiden of these early times. Although she doubtless took her part in agricultural labour,

* The popular belief of the witch riding by night claims a high antiquity; but ecclesiastical authority, wiser in this respect in the 11th than in the 16th and 17th centuries, declared that belief to be a mere hallucination. Thus the prelate mentioned above, quoting an earlier decree, says, "Let no woman boast that she rides by night with the Lady Hera, or Benzoria, with an innumerable multitude, for this is an illusion of the demon." This notion was linked with a poetical fable; it was, that the aerial voyagers always directed their flight toward Palestine; for she who, at a given time, should *first* dip her hand in the river Jordan, would become mistress of the world.

she certainly never performed those heavy and toilsome services which women in France and Scotland, even in the present day, perform. In the rude illuminations of this, and the preceding century, which exhibit rural occupations, we constantly find men engaged in the various out-door employments; and, when females are seen, they are either tending the huge cauldron-shaped pot that swings from the crook over the log-fire, or holding the primitive distaff in one hand, while the other is occupied in twirling the thread. Indeed, the very term, appropriated from Saxon times to the unmarried woman, "spinster," in itself bears witness to the easy and feminine duties which were chiefly required during these ages at female hands.

With this slight sketch of the various classes of women during the twelfth century, the present volume closes. It is, indeed, a dim and a shadowy sketch, in which, although we may catch a faint gleam of the "cloth of gold," "cloth of frieze" is scarcely discernible. But a clearer light, from the close of this century, breaks in upon us; and the succeeding period will present, in stronger colours and with more picturesque effect, like the

illuminations of the self-same period, the progress of female society in England.

Comparatively uninteresting as the history of the twelfth century may be to the general reader, it was a most important period. The peaceful and improving reign of Beauclerc, the fierce civil wars of his successor, the iron rule of the first Plantagenet, the splendours of the earlier years of his sway, and the bitter feuds of its close,—each reign, each successive event, did its part in arousing the popular mind, and in awakening its yet dormant energies.

And many were the conflicting influences, yet all harmoniously working together, which were then moving over the face of society. But a more powerful influence than all had arisen, and even now had begun to impress a new character, not upon England alone, but upon all Europe — a silent and a gentle influence, yet mighty in its gentleness, for it was the spirit of Chivalry.

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